851
L 587zG
LSC
UNC-CH

WORKS AND LIFE OF
GIACOMO LEOPARDI

THE LIBRARY OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF
NORTH CAROLINA

ENDOWED BY THE
DIALECTIC AND PHILANTHROPIC
SOCIETIES

851
L 587zG

This BOOK may be kept out TWO WEEKS ONLY, and is subject to a fine of FIVE CENTS a day thereafter. It was taken out on the day indicated below:

DATE DUE

7 Jul'31 SH

31Aug'31 RA

15Nov'54 ED

Sir Alex. Duff Gordon Bart
with the W. E. Gladstone's
compliments.

WORKS AND LIFE

OF

GIACOMO LEOPARDI.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

http://www.archive.org/details/workslifeofgiaco00glad

WORKS AND LIFE OF GIACOMO LEOPARDI.

1. *Opere di Giacomo Leopardi.* Edizione accresciuta, ordinata, e corretta, secondo l' ultimo intendimento dell' autore, da Antonio Ranieri. Tomi II. Firenze. 1845.
2. *Di Giacomo Leopardi* Volume Terzo. Studii Filologici, raccolti e ordinati da Pietro Pellegrini e Pietro Giordani. Firenze. 1845.
3. *Di Giacomo Leopardi* Volume Quarto. Saggio sopra gli Errori Popolari degli Antichi. Pubblicato per cura di Prospero Viani. Firenze. 1846.
4. *Epistolario di Giacomo Leopardi.* Raccolto e ordinato da Prospero Viani. Tomi II. Firenze. 1849.
5. *Poesie di Giacomo Leopardi.* Napoli. 1849.

GENIUS, unless guided by a malignant spirit, has an indefeasible claim to our sympathy in its reverses, and in its achievements to our fervid admiration: nor is there any more touching, any more instructive lesson, than such as are afforded by its failures in the attempt to realise, out of its own resources and without the aid of Divine revelation, either intellectual contentment or a happy life.

In the writings of Giacomo Leopardi there are other sources of pathetic interest: the misfortunes of his country, both its political and social, and its religious misfortunes, and his own personal difficulties and calamities, have stamped their image indelibly upon his works, and may be traced while we peruse them, not only in the solemn and impassioned verses, or in the mournful letters, of which they are more or less directly the theme, but in the tone which pervades the whole.

We believe it may be said without exaggeration, that he was one of the most extraordinary men whom this century has produced, both in his powers, and likewise in his performances, achieved as they were under singular disadvantage. For not only did he die at thirty-eight, almost *nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita*, and at the time when most great men are but beginning the efforts which have stamped them with that character; but likewise, 'Heaven's unimpeached decrees' in his case nearly—

'Made that shortened span one long disease.'*

* From Mr. Canning's Verses on the Death of his Eldest Son.

By

851
L687=G

By the time he was seventeen, he had destroyed by the ardour and intensity of his studies the very foundations of health and strength. From that year forward he was an invalid, with intervals of remission, progressively growing shorter, and very frequently under acute pain or most severe nervous depression; and his sight fell into so deplorable a state, that for more than a twelvemonth from March, 1819, he was totally unable to read, and nearly so to write. A short letter, for example, which he begins on the 1st of October he cannot finish until the 22nd.* The life thus wasted by disease was likewise frightfully oppressed by melancholy—not a melancholy *ad libitum*, gentle and ladylike, but one that was deeply seated both in physical and moral causes. Let us hear him at eighteen: *A tutto questo aggiunga l' ostinata, nera, orrenda, barbara malinconia, che mi lima e mi divora, e collo studio s' alimenta, e senza studio s' accresce.*† In 1828 there came, from renewed application to literary labours not of choice but for subsistence, what he considered the final overthrow of his health and constitution.‡ And in December, 1830, he prefixed to his poems, being then thirty-two, a dedication to his Tuscan friends, from which we make this touching extract:—

'Sperai che questi cari studii avrebbero sostentata la mia vecchiezza, e credetti colla perdita di tutti gli altri piaceri, di tutti gli altri beni della fanciullezza e della gioventù, avere acquistato un bene che da nessuna forza, da nessuna sventura, mi fosse tolto. Ma io non aveva appena vent' anni, quando da quella infermità di nervi e di viscere, che privandomi della mia vita, non mi da speranza della morte, quel mio solo bene mi fu ridotto a meno che a mezzo; poi due anni prima de' trenta, mi è stato tolto del tutto: e io credo oramai per sempre. Ben sapete, che queste medesime carte io non ho potuto leggere; e per emendarle m'è convenuto servirmi degli occhi e della mano d' altri. Non mi so più dolere, miei cari amici; e la coscienza che ho della grandezza della mia infelicità non comporta l' uso delle querele. Ho perduto tutto: sono un tronco che sente e pena.'§

With a life thus limited to thirty-eight, and with only the first moiety of it available in the ordinary degree for study, Count Giacomo Leopardi amassed great stores of profound and varied learning, proved himself to be possessed of profound literary judgment, exquisite taste, and a powerful imagination; and earned in his own country the character summed up in the words of one of his editors, as *sommo filologo, sommo poeta, e sommo filosofo.*‖ He¶ was born on the 29th of June, 1798, at Recanati, in the March of Ancona, the eldest son of Count Monaldo Leopardi,

* Op. V., p. 157. † Op. V., p. 24. ‡ Ibid., VI., p. 195.
§ Poesie, p. v., Op. V., p. 153. ‖ Pietro Giordani, Op. III., p. vii.
¶ See Ranieri's Notizia, Op. I., p. x.; Autobiographical Memorandum, Op. V., p. 467; also pp. 86, 89; also Op. III., p. 463.

himself

himself in some sense a man of letters, but of temperament and opinions the most opposite to those of Giacomo. He had for his tutors two priests, who instructed him in Latin and in the elements of philosophy; but he had no teacher or adviser of any kind in his studies after his fourteenth year, and it is plain that he had outstripped his nominal guides long before it. He says himself that he commenced his independent course of study at ten. A French writer, we perceive, asserts that he began Greek at eight, his tutors rendering him no aid, but with the grammar of Padua in his hand. He continues with *naïveté*, and we doubt not with truth: *l'enfant jugea cette grammaire insuffisante, et décidé à s'en passer, il se mit à aborder directement les textes qu'il trouvait dans la Bibliothèque de son père.** We are involuntarily reminded of Hermes, respecting whom it is recorded in the Homeric hymn, that—

> 'ἠῷος γεγονὼς, μέσῳ ἤματι ἐγκιθάριζεν,
> ἑσπέριος βοῦς κλέψεν ἑκηβόλου Ἀπολλῶνος.'

Not later than when he had just completed his tenth year, he commenced the course of study which he himself calls *matto e disperatissimo*, not only without a teacher, but without the faintest suggestion for his guidance, without encouragement, without sympathy. Never, as he writes in 1820, did he seek or get any other aid than his own patient toil.† No one, as he tells Giordani in 1817, was at hand to secure him against blundering at every step he took;‡ and he had been taught by those around him not to covet the knowledge of the classics, but to despise them. By the time, however, that he was sixteen years of age, living for the most part in a library, of which the contents had been collected by his father, he became master, not merely of the whole range of the literature properly termed classical, but of a large portion of the works of the later Greek and Latin authors of different schools, and he was also extensively conversant, at least in certain departments, with the works of the Fathers of the Church. That is to say, he had not merely read and understood these authors, but he composed in the year 1815, at the age we have last named, a work entitled *Saggio sopra gli Errori Popolari degli Antichi*, and forming the fourth volume of this collection, which showed that he had a mastery of their contents and a facility in the use of them, such as few men of any single generation have attained even in their mature or declining years.

In the meantime the study of other languages was not neglected. In his own tongue, above all except the Greek, he was training his exquisite critical faculties, and was growing to be

* Op. III., p. 315; from the Revue des Deux Mondes, Sept. 15, 1844.
† Op. V., p. 174. ‡ Ibid., p. 23.

profoundly

profoundly acquainted with its scholarship and one of its very best prose writers. But he also gathered as he went along a knowledge of French, English, Spanish, German, and Hebrew. The volumes before us contain evidence that he composed with ease, at any rate in the two first of these languages. In or about his eighteenth year, his critical collections in MS. amounted to six or seven large volumes;* and though it is unsafe in general to measure by quantity, any reader of his works will be aware that he was absolutely incapable of writing trash. In 1817 he heard that some literary foreigner, whose name is not mentioned, had sent him word that he might become a great philologian.† Before that time he was solely sustained and stimulated by that inborn consciousness of genius which lives and works long before it speaks, and by a presentiment of greatness from which modesty was by no means excluded. Thus he writes in September of the same year to Giordani:—

'Certo che non voglio vivere tra la turba: la mediocrità mi fa una paura mortale: ma io voglio alzarmi e farmi grande ed eterno coll' ingegno e collo studio: impresa ardua, e forse vanissima per me, ma agli uomini bisogna non disanimarsi, nè disperare di loro stessi.' ‡

May his words be as a spark to light up similar aspirations in the breasts of English youth, but under better auspices, with better safeguards, and for a happier end.

To estimate aright the magnitude of his efforts and successes, particularly with regard to Greek, the literary atmosphere, so to speak, in which he lived must be taken into account. From the volumes before us it would appear that this noble study, so widely spread in some countries of Europe, is not only neglected, but is within a few degrees of utter extinction in Italy. Giordani, in giving his reasons for not reprinting a remarkable work of Leopardi's, states that 'in Italy it would be rather hopeless than simply difficult to find a competent printer for a work almost wholly Greek; and to find so many as five readers for it quite impossible.'§ The errors in the Greek typography of the volumes before us, and even of the *errata* appended to them, give some colour to the statement. Another of Leopardi's editors, Pellegrini, assures us that not only the works but the names of the German philologians were unknown throughout Italy at the time,‖ and seems to speak of a thorough knowledge of Greek as being still next door to a miracle there. ¶ There is probably exaggeration in these testimonies, and it is fair to observe that the

* Op. V., p. 34. This was in May, 1817, when he was approaching nineteen; but it appears, from pp. 48, 49, 52, that his health had then been broken for nearly two years, and that for several months he had almost entirely given up reading.

† Ibid. ‡ Op. V., p. 57. § Op. III., p. xx. ‖ Ibid., p. 298.

¶ Ibid., p. 292.

very

very work to which Giordani refers was twice printed at Rome, while the Chronicle of Eusebius, on which it was a commentary, proceeded from the Milanese press. Leopardi himself, however, writes from Rome to his father in 1822, that all learning except such as is archæological was utterly neglected in that city, which it is plain is very far from being the literary capital of Italy; and adds,* 'the best of all is, that one does not find a single Roman who is really master of Latin and Greek,' though he has met with some learned foreigners '*ben altra cosa che i Romani.*' The most pungent evidence of all perhaps is, that when preparing the Preface to his 'Saggio' in 1815, the boy takes care to apprise his readers, that he has translated exactly from the original into Italian all his Greek citations, putting those from the poets into verse. He dealt with them as in this country a writer would deal with citations from the Sanscrit; and it is scarcely an exaggeration to say, that in order to estimate aright the energy of character and of intellect required for such efforts as his, not merely in Italy but at Recanati, we must conceive a child among us scarcely yet in trowsers, setting himself to Sanscrit, and acquiring it without a master in less than half the time that the most promising pupils would generally spend upon it, with all the apparatus and all the inspiring associations of learned society and of suitable establishments to assist them.

His literary life divides itself into two great periods: the first of them occupied by his philological labours and by translations from the classical poets, the second chiefly by poetry and philosophy. The division is not minutely accurate; but his first poem of any note was written in 1817, when in its own words he was a *garzon di nove e nove soli:* he only published three of his odes before the year 1824, and he had then written but little poetry; he had for some years before that, from the state of his sight as we suppose, almost entirely ceased from his philological labours, and had already designated them as the studies of his boyhood.† And all his efforts in philosophy belong to the later division of his life, which begins about the last-named year.

The earliest composition among his published works is the 'Essay on the Popular Errors of the Ancients,' dated in the year 1815, and written therefore in his 17th or early in his 18th year. It is remarkable not only for the quantity of erudition, classical and patristic, which he had even then accumulated—his editor has appended a list of near four hundred authors whom he cites—but for the facility with which he handles his materials, and with which also he philosophises upon them.

---

* Op. V., pp. 249, 51.

† Op. V., p. 268, in January, 1823.

Homage

Homage is emphatically rendered in this work to the Christian religion: the youthful author tells us that unbelief had generated worse prejudices than had ever sprung from credulity, and that the name of philosopher had become odious with the sounder part of mankind; he declares* Christianity to be the second mother of our race, and asserts that the true Church had ever condemned superstition,† against which she is the true and the only bulwark.‡ And yet we see a baleful shadow projected even at this early period over his future, where he eulogises Voltaire as 'that standard-bearer of bold minds, that man so devoted to reason and so hostile to error.'§ The time was too near at hand when he would be prepared to subscribe that scoffer's words:—

'*O Jupiter, tu fis en nous créant*
Une froide plaisanterie.'

But what strange idea and stranger practice of education must prevail, where the admiration of Voltaire as an apostle of true reason grows up peacefully in the mind of a boy, side by side with the admiration of the Church of Rome as the unsparing foe of superstition!

To those who may examine the work, we would point out the enumeration of errors touching physics (commencing at p. 117), and the twelfth chapter on the Earth, as good specimens of it. The whole, we are told, only occupied its author for two months;‖ but it is a work not unworthy to live.

The only specimens of original composition in Greek verse (in Latin there are none) which these volumes afford, are two Anacreontic odes, written in 1817.¶ We doubt whether they justify the panegyric of Giordani, '*Per verità neppure esso Anacreonte le potrebbe discernere tra le sue proprie figliuole.*' They would, we suppose, when cleared of some inaccuracies, probably due to defective typography, be termed good exercises at Eton, but no more; and this is among the easiest descriptions of Greek composition. But it is not to be inferred from hence that Leopardi could not have excelled in the difficult parts of this as much as in other departments; and besides, we are to recollect, first that he wrought without a master; secondly, that his exertions were made for glory; he writes to Giordani:—

'*Io ho grandissimo, forse smoderato e insolente, desiderio di gloria.*' (March 21st, 1817.)**

And Italian taste and study do not appear to be directed towards composition in the classical languages at all, if we except Latin prose for particular purposes: the branch, let it be added, in which our own public schools and universities least excel. We find

* Op. IV., p. 303. † Ibid., pp. 32, 33. ‡ Ibid., p. 300.
§ Ibid., p. 99. ‖ Op. III., p. 465. ¶ Vol. iii. p. 148. ** Vol. v. p. 14.

find here and there some fragments of what may be called commentator's Latin, from which it would appear that he at once made himself master of that instrument.

More remarkable, we think, were his translations from the Greek. In 1815 he published, and therefore not improbably in his seventeenth year wrote, a complete translation of Moschus, with a learned and acute discourse prefixed to it, containing, among other things, a severe criticism upon the affected and licentious manner of certain French translations of his works and those of Anacreon. He was, however, at all times a sharper critic to himself than to any other author. He says, while yet a youth, '*Sono io di tal tempra, che nulla mi va a gusto di quanto ho fatto due o tre mesi innanzi.*'* And again, he writes playfully, that at a former period his compositions were fit to last only for a day, but now for a whole week;† and he soon became dissatisfied with this work, which, nevertheless, appears to be extremely well executed.

In 1816 he went on to publish a translation of the first Book of the Odyssey; and in 1817 the second Book of the Æneid. He was himself sensible of the great difficulty of translating Virgil, and his own effort must be admitted to be a failure; the spirit of the original evaporates in the operation, and the work is dead and flat. It is also rather diffuse: for example, the three noble lines, beginning *et si fata deûm*, are rendered into nearly six. Nor has it the perfect fidelity which he claims for it, saying *ho tenuto sempre dietro al testo a motto a motto.*‡ Take, for instance:—

> '*cadit et Ripheus, justissimus unus*
> *Qui fuit in Teucris et servantissimus æqui.*
> *Dis aliter visum.*'

He renders it—

> '*cade Rifeo*
> *De' Trojani il più giusto e il piu fermo*
> *Del dritto servator. N' ebbero i numi*
> *Altra sentenza.*'

In which it is obvious to remark that he has not at all touched the peculiar force of *unus*, and that while Virgil certainly intended to convey a variation of idea by the use of the word *æqui* after having already called Ripheus *justissimus*, it is impossible to discriminate between the *giusto* and the *dritto*. We still more question the rendering which follows. Surely Virgil did not mean that the gods considered Ripheus to be a bad man, but intended to suggest elliptically, after *æqui*, the reflection, that such a man as Ripheus ought not to have been cut off;§ the idea,

* Vol. iii. p. 171. † Vol. v. p. 83. ‡ Op. III, p. 169.
§ See Heyne and Buttmann in loc.

be

be it added, which he conveys more distinctly, a few lines later, about Pantheus:—

> '*nec te tua plurima Pantheu*
> *Labentem pietas, nec Apollinis infula texit.*'

But then the mind of the narrator checks itself, and submits to destiny in the words *Dîs aliter visum.*

In justice to Leopardi we should perhaps quote Dryden:—

> '*Then Ripheus followed, in th' unequal fight:*
> *Just of his word, observant of the right.*
> *Heaven thought not so.*'

That is, he simply takes his author by storm.

Leopardi, however, had a most exalted conception of the function of a translator. He says he translated the second book of the Æneid, because *he could not help it;* that after reading it, as was commonly the case with anything that he read and thought really beautiful, he was in an agony until he had cast it in the mould of his own mind:—

'Perciocchè letta la Eneide (sì come sempre soglio, letta qualcosa è, o mi par, veramente bella) io andava del continuo spasimando, e cercando maniera di far mie, ove si potesse in alcuna guisa, quelle divine bellezze.'—*Op.* iii. p. 169; *Compare*, v. 27.

And then he laid down a great principle:—

'So ben dirti aver io conosciuto per prova, che senza esser poeta non si può tradurre un vero poeta.'—*Ibid.*

Which he extended in his Discourse on the Fame of Horace:—

'Finalmente si è conosciuto un gran traduttore essere un grande scrittore, e non poter dirsi raro, perchè la Fenice non è rara.' *

Every translation of a great work, to be good, must have great original qualities. We must not confound the subject by assimilating the work of the translator to that of the copyist in painting. In that case the problem is to construct an image of the picture, given the same materials. But in the case of pure mental products the material form is the language, and the very condition of the work is that this be changed, as the workman must reproduce in another tongue; and in proportion as the original to be rendered is a great one, the union between the thought of the writer and his language is more intimate: at every step as the translator proceeds, he feels that he is tearing asunder soul and body, life and its vehicle; so that in order to succeed in his task, he must, within certain limits, create anew.

To create anew was Leopardi's idea of translating, and such he very clearly showed it to be in his later efforts of this description, which are prose translations from Xenophon, Isocrates,

* Op. III., p. 116.

Epictetus,

Epictetus, and others; executed in the latter part of his life, and only published after his death in the posthumous edition of his works. It is evident that while he was engaged upon them, the idea and aim of reproduction predominated over that of mere representation. And so far as we have been able to examine them in close comparison with the original text, we have found them not sufficiently precise in their character—their secondary character, as we readily admit—of copies, to satisfy a scholar of the English type: but admirable in their force and spirit; and, if viewing them with a foreign eye, we may presume to say so much—although only re-echoing the judgments of native and skilled Italians—faultless as compositions; bearing that stamp of freshness and of power, which realizes Leopardi's idea of a translator's function in its normal state.

We have other evidence, however, how deeply he had drunk in early life at classic fountains. In May, 1816,* he wrote, and in 1817 he published, in Italian blank verse, a Hymn to Neptune, which was purely his own, but which purported to be a translation from a recently discovered manuscript. We quote the following passage as a specimen:—

'*I Tessali Petreo*
Diconti, ed altri Onchestio, ed altri pure
Egeo ti noma e Cinade e Fitalmio.
Io dirotti Asfaleo, poichè salute
Tu rechi a' naviganti. A te fa voti
Il nocchier, quando s' alzano nel mare
L' onde canute, e quando in nera notte
Percote i fianchi al ben composto legno
Il flutto alti-sonante, che s' incurva
Spumando, e stanno tempestose nubi
Su le cime degli alberi, e del vento
Mormora il bosco al soffio (orrore ingombra
La mente de' mortali), e quando cade,
Precipitando giù dal ciel, gran nembo
Sopra l' immenso mare. O Dio possente,
Che Tenaro e la sacra Onchestia selva
E Micale e Trezene ed il pinoso
Istmo, ed Ega, e Geresta in guardia tieni,
Soccorri a' naviganti; e, fra le rotte
Nubi, fa che si vegga il cielo azzurro
Ne la tempesta, e su la nave splenda
Del sole o de la luna un qualche raggio,
O de le stelle, e 'l soffiar de' venti
Cessi, e tu l' onde romorose appiana
Si che campin dal rischio i marinai.'

* Op. V., 35.

If

If we are not mistaken in our view of the thoroughly Hellenic tone and basis of this composition, it is one going far to warrant what he said of himself, that the Greek form of thought was more clear and vivid in his mind than the Latin or even the Italian.*

It would appear, from a statement of his own, that the Roman world was completely taken in by this pretended discovery, and the keeper of the Vatican Library would have it that the original manuscript must have been filched from that great repository.†

We can dwell but little upon his philological achievements, although they constitute one of his most durable, and also his most innocuous, titles to fame. For notwithstanding that we have six pretty substantial volumes before us, all filled, or nearly so, with his productions, and everything that they contain is remarkable, there is among them no paper relating to classical philology or criticism so considerable as to give a full impression of his marvellous powers. It is with some reluctance that we refer to the cause. It appears, however, that in the year 1830, when he had left, and, as it proved, for ever, his father's house, his health being ruined, and his circumstances narrow to the last degree, he made over the whole of these papers—*lavori immensi*,‡ as he himself calls them,§ *ingens schedularum copia*, according to the receiver himself—to Mr. De Sinner; and it is plainly declared that he did this with the expectation which he founded upon his communications held with Mr. De Sinner in person, that they would shortly be given to the world, and would minister alike to his fame and his means of subsistence. But in 1832, he says that they send him from France, Holland, and Germany memoirs, translations, and laudatory articles, but no remittances.‖ Nay, it appears that even to this day no one of all those manuscripts, except certain Excerpta, printed at Bonn in 1834, by way of *promulsis*,¶ has seen the light through the medium of their foster-father; and in the catalogue of his works, at the end of the third volume, we read with regret some thirteen times the words '*inedito presso il De Sinner*;' these titles comprising all his philological papers of moment, except one which he had published many years before. Nor is this singular state of facts ascribable to the negligence of the Italian editors: for we are distinctly informed that application was made to Mr. De Sinner for aid to their edition of the works from the materials in his possession, and that he neither gave the papers nor assigned any reason for withholding them.** We trust that

* Ranieri's Memoir, vol. i. p. xii. † Vol. v. p. 46.

‡ Op. VI., p. 152. Egli, se piacerà a Dio, li redigerà e completerà, e li farà pubblicare in Germania, e me ne promette danari e un gran nome.

§ Op. I., p. xxix. ‖ Op. VI., p. 195. ¶ Op. I., p. xxx.

** Op. III., p. ix.; and VI., 152.

there

here is a good defence to be made to this indictment; but the first aspect of the case seems to betoken an urgent necessity for either the vindication of such conduct or its amendment.

In the year 1814. at the age of sixteen and two months, he placed in his father's hands, as the latter has noted in a memorandum on the manuscript, his Revision and illustrations of the text of Porphyry *De vitâ Plotini et ordine librorum ejus;* and even this early production appears to have afforded valuable aid* to the labours of an older scholar, Creuzer, upon Plotinus. It was followed in the same year by his 'Commentary on the Life and Writings of Rhetoricians of the First and Second Centuries of the Christian era,' and by a 'Collection of Fragments of Early Fathers and Historians of the Church before Eusebius,' with his own notes.

But we will pass on from these, which remain unpublished, to his 'Annotations on the Chronicle of Eusebius,' which had been first edited by Mai from the Armenian version. They were written at twenty years of age, and printed in 1823, and it is their singular demerit which has mainly engendered the existing dissatisfaction at the non-appearance of his other works of the same kind. The judgment of Niebuhr upon the author of this work, it has been properly observed, may suffice for those who have not the opportunity of examining it, without quoting the concordant testimonies of other scholars. He says, in a publication of 1823, '*Eruditissimi, quorum egregia inventa profero, sunt Bluhmius, jam inter jurisconsultos nobilitatus, et Comes Jacobus Leopardius Recanatensis Picens, quem Italiæ suæ jam nunc conspicuum ornamentum esse populoribus meis nuntio, indiesque eum ad majorem claritatem perventurum esse spondeo; ego vero qui candidissimum præclari adolescentis ingenium non secus quam egregiam doctrinam valdè diligam, omni eius honore et incremento lætabor.*' † It is even more interesting to quote, as we are enabled to do on the best authority, the words of Niebuhr to his friend and successor the Chevalier Bunsen, when, upon hearing that the author of these *Annotazioni* was in Rome, he had with difficulty discovered his apartment. 'Conceive my astonishment when I saw standing before me, pale and [redacted] a mere youth, in a poor little chamber, of weakly figure, and obviously in bad health, he being by far the first—rather indeed the only real Greek philologian in Italy, the author of Critical Observations which would have gained honour for the first philologian of Germany, and only twenty-two years old;‡ he had grown to be thus profoundly learned, without

* Op. III., p. 463.

† Ibid., p. 311. Niebuhr, Pref. ad Flavii Merobaudis Carmina, ed. 2, p. 13.

‡ Leopardi was at this time twenty-four, but only twenty when he wrote the Annotations.

school,

school, without teacher, without help, without encouragement, in his father's sequestered house! I understand too that he is one of the first of the rising poets of Italy. What a nobly-gifted people!'

Until the occasion when Niebuhr saw him in Rome, Leopardi had never quitted his father's house at Recanati. While prosecuting his studies in the library of the house, and almost living there, he had to bear * not only the negative evil of the absence of positive sympathy and aid, but the slights often due and always rendered to boy-critics and philosophers. From the editor of the 'Biblioteca Italiana,' to which he first made the offer of some contributions, he could scarcely obtain any notice of his letters,† and he gives a most lively description of the usual treatment *de haut en bas* he met with *tra questa vilissima plebe marchigiana e romana*:—

'Alla fine io sono un fanciullo e trattato da fanciullo: non dico in casa, dove mi trattano da bambino, ma fuori, chiunque ha qualche notizia della mia famiglia, ricevendo una mia lettera e vedendo questo nuovo Giacomo, se pure non mi piglia per l' anima di mio nonno morto 35 anni fa, che portò questo nome, s' appone ch' io sia uno de' fantocci di casa, e considera che rispondendo egli uomo fatto (fosse ancora un castaldo) a me ragazzo, mi fa un favore: e però con due righe mi spaccia, delle quali l' una contiene i saluti per mio padre. In Recanati poi io sono tenuto quello che sono, un vero e pretto ragazzo, e i più ci aggiungono i titoli di saccentuzzo, di filosofo, d' eremita, e che so io. Di maniera che s' io m' arrischio di confortare chicchessia a comperare un libro, o mi risponde con una risata, o mi si mette in sul serio, e mi dice, che non è più quel tempo: che venga avanti e vedrò io: che anch' egli dell' età mia aveva questo genio di comprar libri, il quale se n'è ito, venendo il giudizio: che il medesimo succederà a me: e allora io ragazzo non posso alzare la voce e gridare: Razza d' asini! se vi pensate, ch' io m' abbia a venire simile a voi altri, v' ingannate a partito che io non lascerò d' amare i libri se non quando mi lascerà il giudizio il quale voi non avete avuto mai, non ch' egli vi sia venuto quando avete lasciato di amare i libri.'§

This, however, was one of the rare and short outbreaks of vivacity for which indeed it is quite plain that he had all the natural materials in plenty, but they were crushed both by the real weight of his calamities and by the magnified powers with which his acute sensibilities invested them. He never, says Viani, could hold long the strain of merriment.‖ His harp, like his mind and life, was naturally qualified for 'notes of gladness:'—

> '*But yet it oftener told a tale*
> *Of more prevailing sadness.*'

* Op. V., p. 80. † Ibid., pp. 64, 75, 76. ‡ In 1817, V., p. 72.
§ To Giordani, 5th Dec., 1817, vol. v. p. 73. ‖ Op. III., 449.

A deep

A deep and settled melancholy came upon him early in youth, nd accompanied him to the end. A distinguished person who knew him well, and, like all apparently who so knew him, loved him well, during his later years, assures us that he never saw Leopardi either laugh or smile. His friend and editor Ranieri tates that he never sought compensation for mental sorrow, or ried to benumb its sting, by the brute force of sensual enjoyment. So that in every meaning he could have adopted the motto—

'Ich gehöre nicht den Freuden an.' *

Whatever may be thought of the real causes of his unhappiness, t will be plain to all readers of his works and letters that nothing ittle and paltry ever found a place in his mind or would have iven him a moment's care. An intense sensibility and craving or love and for the signs of love is visible throughout, and with t a real modesty and trustfulness, a genuine indifference to wealth nd luxury, a spirit too lofty, perhaps too proud, for anything so oor as vanity. We take this exemption to be more clearly hown in no way than by the absence of anything like soreness of eeling about the defects of his personal appearance, while he vas aware in full of the disadvantage they entailed. Describing he effect of his excessive studies, he says:—

'E mi sono rovinato infelicemente e senza rimedio per tutta la vita, rendutomi l' aspetto miserabile, e dispregievolissima tutta quella gran parte dell' uomo, che è la sola a cui guardino i più, e coi più bisogna onversare in questo mondo: e non solamente i più, ma chicchessia è ostretto a desiderare che la virtù non sia senza qualche ornamento steriore, e trovandonela nuda affatto, s' attrista, e per forza di natura, he nessuna sapienza può vincere, quasi non ha coraggio d' amare quel irtuoso, in cui niente è bello fuorchè l' anima. Questa ed altre misere ircostanze ha posto la fortuna intorno alla mia vita, dandomi una otale apertura d' intelletto perch' io le vedessi chiaramente e m' accorgessi di quello che sono, e di cuore, perch' egli conoscesse che a lui non si conviene l' allegria, e quasi vestendosi a lutto, si togliesse la malinconia er compagna eterna ed inseparabile.'†

In this letter, written at nineteen, the reader will notice his reat powers of expression, his tendency to philosophise, and a loom as remarkable as his wonderful endowments. And from nother passage in it, where he refers to another event that must appen, and had already happened in part, *una cosa più fiera di utte*, we gather that he had already lost all hold of Christianity, nd that he felt more acutely than any other evil the pain and hame of a continued exterior profession of it, as well as the fear f making the disclosure of his sentiments.

In addition to the *hiatus* in his works which we have already noticed,

* Goethe, Bride of Corinth.

† Op. V., pp. 86, 87.

noticed, they are presented to us in a confused and irregular series, and there is nothing that assumes the name of a biography attached to them, while each of four editors has prefixed to separate portions some sketch of his own, and other piecemeal testimonies and panegyrics are given in different parts of the collection. Nothing can be more unfavourable to the formation of a just and careful judgment upon either the works or the life of the author.

In the absence, however, of a regular biography, the 'Epistolario,' containing between five and six hundred of his letters, supplies, though with great lack both of connexion and of explanation, many records both of his life and studies, and is of great interest on various accounts. He seems to have been from the first a master, as in other things that he touched, so also in letter-writing. When only eighteen he addressed the following to Monti, with a copy of his version of the second Æneid. Its ideas of course must not be considered according to English manners, but *mutatis mutandis* :—

'*Recanati*, 21 *Febbraio*, 1817.

'Stimatissimo Sig. Cavaliere,—Se è colpa ad uomo piccolo lo scrivere non provocato a letterato grande, colpevolissimo sono io, perchè a noi si convengono i superlativi delle due qualità. Ne altro posso allegare a mia scusa che la smania incomprensibile di farmi noto al mio principe (poichè suddito le sono io certo, come amatore quale che sia delle lettere) e il tremito che provo scrivendo a lei, che scrivendo a Re non mi avverrebbe di provare. Ricevrà per mia parte dal Sig. Stella, miserabilissimo dono, la mia traduzione del secondo libro della Eneide, anzi non dono, ma argomento di riso al traduttore della Iliade primo in Europa, e al grande amico del grande Annibal Caro. Ed ella rida, che il suo riso sarà di compassione, e la sua compassione più grata ed onorevole a me che l'invidia di mille altri. Non la prego che legga il mio libro, ma che non lo rifiuti: ed, accettandolo, mi faccia chiaro che ella non si tiene offeso dal mio ardimento, con che verrà a cavarmi di grande ansietà.'*

Somewhat later he had, as we may perceive from the next short extract, perfected his power of turning a compliment—a power certainly never so becoming as in a man of generally bold and independent character, and in this instance most gracefully veiling a rebuke. It is addressed to Count Perticari, himself an author :—

'*Recanati*, 30 *Ottobre*, 1820.

'Sig. Conte mio carissimo e stimatissimo,—Poco dopo la mia prima lettera, alla quale rispondeste graziosamente quest' anno passato, io ve ne scrissi altre due, alle quali non rispondeste. Ma non mi dolgo, che non voleste gittare in benefizio di un solo quel tempo che spendevate in vantaggio di molti.'†

* Op. V., p. 10. † Ibid., p. 207.

The

The citations we have already made in the preceding pages may serve as specimens of the lighter and of some of the graver qualities of the letters contained in this collection, of which it may safely be said that the diction is at once careful and easy, natural and refined; the style terse, animated, and diversified in the highest degree; and the matter full of fresh evidence to the powers as well as to the calamities of the author.

Those which are addressed to his father are written in the language of conventional respect and affection, but under evident constraint throughout. In those to his brother, the Count Carlo, and to his sister, he is entirely free and unreserved, but they refer chiefly to matters of domestic concern, or of outward and minor, not always entirely pure, interest, and afford no measure in general of his powers or of his trials. It is in the letters to Giordani, the only *man* (July, 1819) that he knows,* that he most fully pours out his whole soul and displays the riches of his acquirements, of his critical taste, and of his constructive understanding. They abound, like those of Giordani himself, which are subjoined, with expressions of the warmest affection; and, indeed, the correspondence is carried on with the fervour and impatience of two lovers, and with a redundancy of attachment, breaking out into jealousies almost infantine, and slight quarrels just made in order to be mended; the stream only foams the more from being obstructed, and sometimes almost dammed up by the cruel, the abominable, the all-obstructing, all-devouring posts.

It is curious, too, to observe how the two minds respectively find their level according to their power, without strain or even consciousness. In the early part of these communications Giordani cheers, encourages, and patronises his youthful correspondent. But about Leopardi's 22nd year he began (see, for example, Op. V. p. 163), quite without ostentation or assumption, to act the tutor, and, in the familiar phrase, pat his friend on the back. This man, however—we understand an ex-Benedictine who had seceded from his vows—for many years had a monopoly of the rich commerce of his mind; and he was an evil genius to it, confirming all its negative and downward tendencies by his own very gross and scoffing unbelief.

There are other parts of this collection of letters which throw light upon Italian manners and habits in small things and great. It is amusing to find Leopardi recommending his brother to give up his moustaches when he had just reared them to perfection, assuring him that the English, and even the French, not only did not any longer wear them, but even laughed at those who did. There are also many letters relating to the search for fit matches for his sister, and then for his brother, Count Carlo, which was

* Op. V., p. 151.

prosecuted with great vigour, not only in Recanati and the neighbourhood, but at Ravenna, Modena, Reggio, and Parma, with occasional references to Milan, Florence, and Rome.* We must not judge of these matters wholly with an English eye, but must recollect that the facilities of locomotion in a country and the habit of resorting to capitals give facilities of choice, the want of which elsewhere requires more or less the intervention of third parties. The practical difference between Italian habits and our own seems, however, to extend further. There the matter is openly entertained, discussed, and arranged by the relations, with a sort of *veto* in the last stage to the person most concerned. What sort of *veto,* it may reasonably be asked? We should presume from these letters, more than a Royal, but somewhat less than a Presidential one. But in England the whole actual process, except the bare initiative of social introduction, belongs even to a daughter, with a *veto* to the parents: in short, the English daughter exchanges places with the Italian father.

Injudicious, though doubtless well-meant, attempts appear to have been made to press him into holy orders; and they were, most unwarrantably, continued even after he had given evidence conclusive to any dispassionate mind of his infidel opinions: for in 1824 he published the *Bruto Minore,*† with its ominous appendix in prose, and some of his Dialogues were in print as early as January, 1826. In that month it seems that his father offered him a nomination to one or more benefices; and he accepted it on certain conditions, one of which was that he should be dispensed from saying mass after the first few days, though he had no objection to undertaking to recite prayers by himself instead.‡ For this he pleaded his studies and the state of his eyes as an excuse. A subsequent letter, however, throws a strange light upon the current notions of church property, and exhibits to us a form of abuse perhaps more flagrant, but perhaps also more rare, than those which prevail in England. He writes to say he hears that patrons are sometimes allowed at Rome to suspend a presentation for six or eight years, and to apply the revenues in the interim, subject to the usual burdens (of provision for divine service, we presume), for some honourable purpose. He then suggests that his father perhaps might make this arrangement with a view to his support, retaining all the time the same control over the money as over any other part of his income.§ In April, however, of the same year we find him finally ‖ declining 'the benefices' which his father still pressed upon him; and the nomination seems to have fallen on his youngest brother.

We have referred to his view of his own language. Every day

* Op. V., pp. 289, 451, 3, 76, and *alibi.*
† Op. II., p. 99.
‡ Op. V., 393.
§ Ibid., pp. 403, 404.
‖ Ibid.

he

he read it as a portion of his studies;* and he early said (1817) that the man who had familiarised himself with the deeper resources of the Italian would pity those who were obliged to use any other tongue.† It was to him *la lingua regina di tutte le lingue viventi, e delle morte se non regina certo non suddita.*‡ Again, he is struck with the difficulty of translating the noble Greek word ἄθλος, represented sufficiently for our purpose by the English term *feat.*

'Con qual parola italiana renderemo questa greca? *Travaglio* ha il disgustoso, ma non il grande e il vasto. Non pertanto io non m' arrischio di affermare che questa parola non si possa rendere in italiano, tanto poco mi fido di conoscere questa nostra lingua, sovrana, immensa, onnipotente.'—Op. V. p. 50.

He was encouraged in this view of his own tongue by his friend Giordani, who writes to him *non s' impara mai bene la lingua, che è sempre infinita.*

Accordingly, when he published his *Canzoni* in 1824, he appended to them a philological commentary,§ which has been republished in the third or miscellaneous volume of his works. It is directed steadily towards a particular scope, namely, that of enlarging the resources of the language, rarely or never by arbitrary invention, almost always by recurring to its classical authorities; he criticises with great severity the Della Cruscan dictionary, which imposes upon us foreigners by its bulk and pretensions, but is, we believe, lightly esteemed by Italian scholars. In the same spirit he betook himself to the reproduction of the style of the *Trecentisti,* whom he considered to approach most nearly to the style of the Greeks, and best to develop the close affinity which he conceived to exist between the languages, and which, indeed, is obvious in some points of Italian that are not represented in Latin, such as the highly diversified forms of diminution and augmentation, the employment of the article, the virtual possession of a middle voice, and the use of the verb infinitive with the functions of a noun substantive, though he must himself, when translating the Odyssey, have felt the want of a flexible quality in Italian to enable it faithfully to represent the Greek compound adjectives.

Under the name of a *trecentista* translation ‖ from an ancient MS. he published a fictitious account of the martyrdom of certain monks; and the imposition was successful even with the best judges of the style of that period. Not let it be understood that he inherited it from his father. On the contrary, he had been bored in the prevalent Gallicising taste. At the outset, he says,

* Opere, V. (Epistolario I.), 71; Ep. 31 and 254; Ep. 156.
† Ibid., p. 15. ‡ Ibid., p. 47. § Op. III., p. 215.
‖ Op. II., p. 185.

in April, 1817—being then only 18 years old—he had his head full of the new notions, and despised and trampled upon the study of Italian; his own original papers were like mere translations from the French: he wallowed in the reading which since he had learned to detest.* Thus by the native and matured force of his own taste and judgment, and without a guide, he had revolted against the bad rules of his early training, and framed a sound and true system for himself at an age when in ordinary minds, even with the aid of the best instructors, taste and judgment in letters are but beginning to dawn.

As we have seen, his first efforts were applied to philology; and it was not till he was seventeen and a half †—rather an advanced period in his early-ripened mental life—that he gave himself to literature in its ordinary sense. It was probably not so much choice as necessity that threw him upon the former line of study. Not that he had great advantages for it, but the reverse. The merits of his father's library have apparently been exaggerated by Ranieri; ‡ it did not, for example, contain a Xenophon.§ Still it was a library, and it had no modern books; and being thus thrown upon the dead languages, and having for the most part to learn them by means of reading their authors, his acquisitive mind was naturally drawn to their speech and its laws.

We are inclined to trace to this circumstance the accuracy and beauty of his own diction and his admirable style. He had handled early and familiarly those among all the instruments for the expansion of thought, which are the most rigorously adapted to its laws, and had also deeply considered the mode and form of the adaptation. Yet it is certainly wonderful that he should have issued from these studies not only a refined scholar and philologian, but a powerful and lofty poet; as well as that he should have carried to maturity in the most fervid and impatient period of life pursuits which are commonly considered rather dry. But it is a cardinal truth, that no study whatever can be dry to such a mind when earnestly embracing it.

We should gladly have noticed his other labours in Italian,‖ particularly his commentary upon Petrarch, to the merits of which very competent testimony might be quoted; but the expenditure of space warns us to pass on. We do it the more readily because even to do this would not be to do all, for besides the great things that he accomplished, he had cast in the mould of Thought the plans of more and greater.¶

* Op. V., p. 23, p. 174.
† Ibid., p. 34.
‡ Op. I., p. x.
§ Op. V., pp. 58, 65.
‖ There are also opinions we should have been disposed to canvass—for instance, his low estimate of some of the lyric poets of his country; and his comparative judgment on Homer and Hesiod. (Op. III., p. 150.)
¶ Op. VI., p. 126. To Colletta.

When

When we regard Leopardi in his character of a poet—in which no Italian of the present generation, we conceive, except Manzoni even approaches him, and he in a different order, and perhaps but in a single piece—it is not difficult to perceive that he was endowed in a peculiar degree with most of the faculties which belong to the highest excellence. We shall note two exceptions. The first is the solid and consistent wisdom which can have no other foundation in the heart of man than the Gospel revelation: without which, even while we feel the poet to be an enchanter, we cannot accept and trust him as a guide: and of which Wordsworth is an example unequalled probably in our age, and unsurpassed in any age preceding ours. Nor let it be said that this is not properly a poetical defect; because the highest functions of the human being stand in such intimate relations to one another, that the want of any one of them will commonly prevent the attainment of perfection in any other. The sense of beauty enters into the highest philosophy, as in Plato. The highest poet must be a philosopher, accomplished, like Dante, or intuitive, like Shakspeare. But neither the one nor the other can now exist in separation from that conception of the relations between God and man, that new standard and pattern of humanity, which Christianity has supplied. And although much of what it has indelibly impressed upon the imagination and understanding, the heart and life, of man, may be traceable and even prominent in those who individually disown it, although the splendour of these disappropriated gifts may, in particular cases, be among the very greatest of the signs and wonders appointed for the trial of faith, there is always something in them to show that they have with them no source of positive and permanent vitality: that the branch has been torn from the tree, and that its life is on the ebb. There is another point in which Leopardi fails as compared with the highest poets. He is stronger in the reflective than in the perceptive, or at any rate than in the more strictly creative powers. Perhaps these latter were repressed in their growth by the severe realities of his life. It is by them that the poet projects his work from himself, stands as it were completely detached from it, and becomes in his own personality invisible. Thus did Homer and Shakspeare perhaps beyond all other men: thus did Goethe: thus did Dante when he pleased, although his individuality is the local centre, to so speak, of his whole poem;* which is only to say in other words that by this gift the poet throws his entire strength into his work and identifies himself with it; that he not only does, but for the time being is, his work; and that then, when the work is done,

* It would be unjust not to name Mr. Tennyson as a remarkable example of this gift among our living poets.

he

he passes away and leaves it: it is perfect in its own kind, and bears no stamp or trace of him, that is of what in him pertains to the individual as such, and does not belong to the general laws of truth and beauty. Thus all high pictorial poetry is composed: thus every great character in the drama or romance is conceived and executed.

It is the gift of imagination in its highest form and intensity which effects these wonderful transmutations, and places the poet of the first order in a rank nearer to that of creative energies than anything else we know. Next, perhaps, to him comes the great intuitive discoverer. These are the privileged children of Nature, who walk a royal road, and constitute the signal exceptions to that broad and general law of human knowledge: '*Homo, naturæ minister et interpres, tantum facit et intelligit, quantum de naturæ ordine re vel mente observaverit: nec amplius scit, aut potest.*' (*Bacon, Nov. Org.*, Aph. I.)

Leopardi, though he had abundance both of fancy and of imagination, either was not possessed of this peculiar form of the latter gift or had not developed it: his impersonations are beautiful, but rather after the manner of statues: they have just so much of life as is sufficient to put his metaphysical conceptions in motion; but we always seem to discover his hand propping them up and moving them on: they have not the flesh and blood reality: he is eminently a subjective poet, and the reader never loses him from view. But he is surely a very great subjective poet, and applies all the resources of thought and passion, all that his introspective habits had taught him, to his work, with a power rarely equalled: he has choice and flowing diction, a profound harmony, intense pathos, and he unites to very peculiar grace a masculine energy and even majesty of expression, which is not surpassed, so far as we know, in the whole range of poetry or of eloquence, and which indeed gives the highest evidence of its prerogative by endowing sentiments, now become trite and almost vulgar through use, with perfect freshness of aspect and the power to produce lively and strong impressions: of this some examples may be noticed in the extracts we are about to make. His gift of compression, in particular, is one which seems, not borrowed, for such things no man can borrow—they are marked 'not transferable'—but descended or inherited from Dante himself.

Although it has appeared that his first poetical efforts were relatively late, yet they were as early as those of most poets who have acquired particular celebrity for juvenile productions, and they will bear, we imagine, favourable comparison with those of Pope or of Milton. Indeed, as their beginning and maturity were almost simultaneous, he is really no less remarkable as a youthful poet than

han as a youthful scholar and critic, and holds one of the very irst places in the troop of beardless Apollos. Nothing to our ninds can be more beautiful than his first effort; the piece ntitled *Il Primo Amore,* in that purely, and perhaps inalienably, talian measure the *terza rima.* It is so even a tissue of harnonious thought and language, that we have laboured in vain to liscover how to do it justice by an extract: but rather than pass t by altogether, we will quote the passage which begins by lescribing the superior and subtler force that drew him away rom his first love, his studies:—

'Nè gli occhi ai noti studi io rivolgea,
E quelli m' apparian vani, per cui
Vano ogni altro desir creduto avea.
Deh come mai da me sì vario fui
E tanto amor mi tolse un altro amore?
Deh quanto in verità vani siam nui!

* * * *

E l' occhio a terra chino o in se raccolto
Di riscontrarsi fuggitivo e vago
Nè in leggiadro soffria nè in turpe volto:
Che la illibata, la candida imago
Turbare egli temea pinta nel seno,
Come all' aure si turba onda di lago.
E quel di non aver goduto appieno
Pentimento, che l' anima ci grava,
E' l piacer che passò cangia in veleno,
Per li fuggiti dì mi stimolava
Tuttora il sen: che la vergogna e il duro
Suo morso in questo cor già non oprava.
Al cielo, a voi, gentili anime, io giuro
Che voglia non mi entrò bassa nel petto,
Ch' arsi di foco intaminato e puro.
Vive quel foco ancor, vive l' affetto,
Spira nel pensier mio la bella imago
Da cui, se non celeste, altro diletto
Giammai non ebbi, e sol di lei m' appago.'*

In the next year he thus apostrophises Italy: with respect to which we must observe that he was, like most Italians of any nark, comprehensive and impartial in his repugnance to the yoke f strangers, and that he appears still more to have revolted from French than from a German domination. We conceive that this Canzone, with the one which follows it, must at once have placed im in the first rank among the lyric poets of his country:—†

* Canti, No. X., Op. I., p. 39.
† See Giordani's Letter VI., 339, dated 5th February, 1819.

'O patria

' O patria mia, vedo le mura e gli archi
E le colonne e i simulacri e l' erme
Torri degli avi nostri;
Ma la gloria non vedo,
Non vedo il lauro, e il ferro, ond' eran carchi
I nostri padri antichi. Or fatta inerme
Nuda la fronte e nudo il petto mostri.
Oimè quante ferite,
Che lividor, che sangue! Oh qual ti veggio,
Formosissima donna! Io chiedo al cielo
E al mondo: dite, dite,
Chi la ridusse a tale? E questo è peggio
Che di catene ha carche ambe la braccia:
Sì, che sparte le chiome e senza velo
Siede in terra negletta e sconsolata
Nascondendo la faccia
Tra le ginocchia, e piange.
Piangi! che ben hai donde, Italia mia,
Le genti a vincer nata
E nella fausta sorte, e nella ria.

Se fosser gli occhi tuoi due fonti vive,
Mai non potrebbe il pianto
Adeguarsi al tuo danno ed all scorno,
Che fosti donna, or sei povera ancella.
* * * *
O numi, O numi!
Pugnan per altra terra itali acciari!
Oh misero colui, che in guerra è spento
Non per li patrii lidi, e per la pia
Consorte e i figli cari,
Ma da nemici altrui,
Per altra gente, e non può dir morendo:
Alma terra natia
La vita che mi desti ecco ti rendo.'*

We cannot but think that in the strong indignation which prompted the following verses in the same year, from the piece ' On the Monument of Dante to be erected in Florence,'† the master of all Italian poetry,

' *per lo cui verso*
Il Meonio cantor non è più solo,'

as he goes on to say, would have recognized a genius entitled to claim some kindred with his own :—

' O Italia, a cor ti stia
Far ai passati onor: che d' altrettali
Oggi vedove son le tue contrade,
Nè v' è, chi d' onorar ti si convegna.

* Canz. I., Op. I., p. 5. † Canz. II., Op. I., p. 9.

Volgiti

Volgiti indietro, e guarda, O patria mia,
Quella schiera infinita d' immortali
E piangi, e di te stessa ti disdegna:
Che senza sdegno omai la doglia è stolta:
Volgiti, e ti vergogna, e ti riscuoti,
E ti punga una volta
Pensier degl' avi nostri e de' nepoti.'

And again in this majestic burst:—

'O dell' etrusco metro inclito padre,
Se di cosa terrena,
Se di costei, che tanto alto locasti,
Qualche novella ai vostri lidi arriva,
Io so ben che per te gioia non senti:
Che saldi men che cera e men ch' arena
Verso la fama che di te lasciasti
Son bronzi e marmi: e dalle nostre menti
Se mai cadesti ancor, s' unqua cadrai,
Cresca, se crescer può, nostra sciaura,
E in sempiterni guai
Pianga tua stirpe, a tutto il mondo oscura.
Ma non per te!'

In the *Bruto Minore,** published in 1824, he gave more visibly
› the world his unhappy opinions, still, however, veiling himself
y putting them into the mouth of the Roman hero. The fol-
›wing passage may, however, serve as a specimen of its high
oetical merits:—

'E tu dal mar, cui nostro sangue irriga,
Candida Luna, sorgi,
E l' inquieta notte e la funesta
All' ausonio valor campagna esplori.
Cognati petti il vincitor calpesta,
Fremono i poggi, dalle somme vette
Roma antica ruina:
Tu sì placida sei? Tu la nascente
Lavinia prole, e gli anni
Lieti vedesti, e i memorandi allori;
E tu su l' alpe l' immutato raggio
Tacita verserai quando, ne' danni
Del servo italo nome,
Sotto barbaro piede
Rintronerà quella solinga sede.'

In *Consalvo,* a dying youth—recalling, we need hardly add, the
oet—abandoned by all but the object of his love, entreats of her
ıe parting gift of an only kiss. The description which follows
surely a noble specimen of the power of the Italian language
ı blank verse:—

* Canz. VI., Op. I., p. 25.

'Stette

'Stette sospesa e pensierosa in atto
La bellissima donna: e fiso il guardo,
Di mille vezzi sfavillante, in quello
Tenea dell' infelice, ove l' estrema
Lacrima rilucea. Nè dielle il core
Di sprezzar la dimanda, e il mesto addio
Rinacerbir col niego: anzi la vinse
Misericordia dei ben noti ardori.
E quel volto celeste, e quella bocca,
Già tanto desiata, e per molt' anni
Argomento di sogno e di sospiro,
Dolcemente appressando al volto afflitto
E scolorato dal mortale affanno,
Più baci e più, tutta benigna e in vista
D' alta pietà, sulle convulse labbra
Del trepido, rapito amante impresse.'*

The Ode on the Likeness of a beautiful woman sculptured upon her monument is exquisitely beautiful :—

'Tal fosti; or qui sotterra
Polve e scheletro sei. Su l' ossa e il fango
Immobilmente collocato invano
Muto, mirando dell' etadi il volo
Sta, di memoria solo
E di dolor custode, il simulacro
Della scorsa beltà. Quel dolce sguardo,
Che tremar fè, se, come or sembra, immoto
In altrui s' affissò: quel labbro, ond' alto
Par, come d' urna piena,
Traboccare il piacer: quel collo, cinto
Già di desio: quell' amorosa mano
Che spesso, ove fu porta,
Sentì gelida far la man che strinse:
E il seno, onde la gente
Visibilmente di pallor si tinse,
Furo alcun tempo: or fango
Ed ossa sei: la vista
Vituperosa e trista un sasso asconde.

Così riduce il fato
Qual sembianza fra noi parve più viva
Immagine del ciel. Mistèrio eterno
Dell esser nostro. Oggi d' eccelsi, immensi
Pensieri e sensi inenarrabil fonte,
Beltà grandeggia, e pare
Quale splendor vibrato
Da natura immortal su queste arene,
Di sovrumani fati,
Di fortunati regni e d' aurei mondi

* Canti, No. XVII., Op. I., p. 56.

Segno

Segno e sicura spene
Dare al mortale stato:
Diman, per lieve forza,
Sozzo a vedere, abominoso, abbietto
Divien quel che fu dianzi
Quasi angelico aspetto:
E dalle menti insieme
Quel che da lui moveva
Ammirabil concetto si dilegua.' *

From the serious poems we have quoted largely, yet insufiently. We might, if space permitted, advert to *La Ginestra*, e Fragment xxxix, and others among them, from which we have ade no extracts: but we pass on from them with the observation at the reader, opening them at hazard, will find no page of them thout abundant beauties, though in some places they are scarred d blighted by emanations from the pit of his shoreless and ttomless despair. And this brings us to the threshold of the t and very painful portion of our task, some reference, namely, the philosophical speculations of Giacomo Leopardi.

Before entering, however, we must advert shortly to his prinal production in satirical poetry. He wrote very early and en re-wrote a poem, rather imitated than translated from the omeric Batrachomyomachia; and he followed this up with an ginal sequel that he brought to its abrupt ending immediately fore his death. It is written in the *ottava rima*, and extends eight cantos. Perhaps the idea of it may also have been in rt suggested by the Satirical Poem of Casti, *Il Poema Tartaro*, which he attacks the Russians. It shows a facility in using e language for its end quite equal we think to that of Byron Don Juan; and some parts of the political satire for fineness d keenness might rank with that of Swift. He takes up the e at the point where the mice, whose victory over the frogs d been converted into defeat and rout by the arrival of the abs, rally and re-organise themselves, and he continues it in ht cantos, under the name of *Paralipomeni della Batrachomiachia*,† through their subsequent negotiations and war with eir later and more formidable enemy. Nothing can be more ccessful than the passage in which the general of the crabs, in swer to the demand of the envoy of the mice, who wishes to know at right they had to interfere, states that they did it to preserve e balance of power, and goes on to explain the theory of politi- equilibrium. Again, the mice, having lost their monarch, oceed to elect a constitutional sovereign, and declare him not ng of Mouse-land, but only King of the Mice.‡

* Canto XXXI., Op. I., p. 106. † Poesie, p. 177. ‡ Ibid., p. 235.

' Ma

'Ma il novello signor, giurato ch' ebbe
Servar esso e gli eredi eterno il patto,
Incoronato fu, come si debbe:
E 'l manto si vestì di pel di gatto
E lo scettro impugnò che d' auro crebbe,
Nella cui punta il mondo era ritratto,
Perchè credeva allor del mondo intero
La specie soricina aver l' impero.

Dato alla plebe fu cacio con polta,
E vin vecchio gittâr molte fontane,
Gridando ella per tutto allegra e folta:
Viva la carta e viva Rodipane:
Tal ch' echeggiando quell' alpestre vôlta
Carta per tutto ripeteva e pane—
Cose al governo delle culte genti
Chi le sa ministrar, sufficienti.

Re de' topi costui con nuovo nome,
O suo trovato fosse o de' soggetti,
S' intitolò, non di Topaia, come
Propriamente in addietro s'eran detti
I portatori di quell' auree some:
Cosa molto a notar, che negli effetti
Differisce d' assai, benchè non paia,
S' alcun sia re de' Topi o di Topaia.'

It is well worth while to notice in the case of so great a poet his ordinary mode of composition, which he has described with reference to his Odes. He says that in designing and shaping his compositions he always followed on the instant a sudden suggestion of the mind; that it was then his practice to wait for another access of fervour, commonly a month or more afterwards: he would then set himself to compose, but so slowly, that he commonly occupied two or three weeks in finishing even the shortest piece.*

Even at a very early period of his life, he seems to have had a spontaneous or ready-made philosophy for every subject. For example, in a letter to Giordani of May, 1817, he controverts a doctrine of the latter with respect to art. Giordani had admonished young painters never without an overruling necessity to represent what was ugly, and then with tact and reserve: inasmuch as the proper business of art was with beautiful and winning, not with distasteful, objects. No, says Leopardi, their office is to imitate nature *nel verisimile.* And he argues thus. The same general maxims, he conceives, that govern poetry must also hold good for painting. But in poetry, if Giordani were right, it must follow that Homer and Virgil had erred times with-

* Op. V., p. 316.

out

out number; Dante, above all, who had so often represented *il brutto.* Storms, deaths, other calamities are distasteful; but the poets are full of them. Again, tragedy must be radically, and of its own nature, bad. But in the tears, agitation, shuddering, caused by the perusal of poetry, there is real and keen delight, which springs from the vivid imitation and representation of nature, as it brings before us and fills with life what is distant or dead, or purely imaginary. Hence, while the beautiful in actual nature only gives a limited, that of art, having a power not bounded by fact and experience, gives an unlimited delight; and even what is ugly acquires the power to please, provided it be represented according to the *verisimile* or probable in art; for if there should happen to live a man of deformity beyond belief, he would not be a fit subject for painting.*

There can be little doubt that Leopardi misled himself in this case by his analogy drawn from poetry to painting. He was here unconsciously upon the ground trodden so carefully, and, we presume, trodden once for all, by Lessing in his Laocoon. That great and poetical critic shows us how and why the master who produced the unrivalled group and Virgil are alike right, though the former has given to the principal figure a mouth not crying aloud (as Winkelmann had said *erhebt kein schreckliches Geschrei*), while in Virgil (Æn. ii. 222)—

Clamores simul horrendos ad sidera tollit;

the ground being that each follows with equal sagacity the law of the beautiful in his own art, which admits in poetry, for the mind, many things that it excludes in painting, for the eye. So that their material difference is the proof of their formal agreement. But although Leopardi fell here into error, it was a very common and natural error: there have been, until very lately, even if there are not now, eminent artists who would have supported him, and at the very worst his being on the losing side in such case can scarcely cause any deduction from our admiration of the passage we have rudely summed up, in which he shows he had a clear, consistent, and philosophical view of art, while he was yet a boy, had never wandered from the little town of Recanati, and probably had never seen a picture which could do any thing but misinform and mislead him. But, indeed, he showed at this early period, in all the subjects which he handled, his inborn capacity for philosophy, and it is no exaggeration to say, that even his extended learning is not more remarkable than his general acuteness, depth, and continuity of thought.

It may seem strange that if this description be true, his most strictly philosophical writings should present in the results at which

* Vol. v., pp. 39, 40.

he

he arrives so deplorable a picture. The principal of these are his *Operette Morali*, a series of dialogues, first published as a whole at Milan in 1827, though a portion of them had been previously printed; and his *Pensieri Morali*, not published till after his death, that is to say, at Florence in 1845. Of the former he gives us plainly to understand that they were his favourite work;* and in publishing the latter his friend Ranieri has only fulfilled the scheme they jointly arranged before his death. But the opinions which he here brings out in stricter form are but too traceable in some of his poetry, and from the burden of no small number of his letters, especially, we must add, of those in which he writes with entire sincerity and freedom. It is plain that prudential motives often restrained him; as when he writes to Madame Tommassini with reference to one of his published papers, that he looks upon the Greeks as brothers, that he has said as much for them as he could, and enough, he thinks, considering that he was unable to give a free utterance to his opinions.† The censorship, however, if it had power to annoy him, did not avail for any other purpose; and we think all those who peruse his *Operette* will join with us in putting the question, if the publication of works such as these is to be permitted, for what imaginable end is such a tribunal to be maintained?

To speak plainly, then, of his abstract philosophy of life and action, paganism is Gospel light and the Great Desert a *pays riant* in comparison with it. The falseness, misery, and hopelessness of life are the burden of his strain in the familiar letters of his early youth under his father's roof, as often as they become subjective. And as soon as the year 1819 he wrote to Giordani that he had not spirit remaining to conceive a wish, not even for death: he had indeed no fear of it in any respect, but it seemed so little different from life, from life in which now not even pain came to sustain him, but an intense weariness both exhausted him and tormented him as if it had been the extreme of pain, and drove him beside himself in his incapacity to feel that even his despair was a reality. In his happier moods he had just strength enough to weep over the miseries of man and the nullity of all things.‡ This looks like mere rhapsody, and in ordinary cases one would say, it is a love-sick or brain-sick boy, and the very violence of the fit is the best assurance that it cannot last. But with him it was a settled and habitual tone of thought; and only on rare occasions throughout the whole course of his letters or his works will the reader find even a transient expression that is not in unison with it. In common life we are sometimes astonished and appalled at the power of the human frame to endure protracted

* Op. V., pp. 416, 422, 425, 434, 474. † Op. VI., p. 10.
‡ Op. V., p. 158, and V., p. 160.

nervous

nervous agony, and the records of this extraordinary man constantly suggest a similar feeling with respect to the capacity of the mind both to suffer, and to heighten and inflame the causes of its torture. Doubtless, as regarded his practical life, there are deductions to be made from the extreme breadth of these statements. Even while he told Giordani that he could not *conceive a wish*, and even had ceased to understand the meaning of friendship and of affection, he also begged for letters, and said he would always love him. But what we have said is too strictly true of his speculative man, and although his speculations are in reality illogical and incoherent, and cannot be said to form a system further than as universal destruction is a system in a negative sense, yet speculation was in his case the master-key of life.

The child,* he says, is happy, but happy only because he is blind. True life ends where manhood begins; none lives longer, except those who continue to be children after they are grown up. Study has value because it is the most secure source of forgetfulness, and a more durable illusion than most others. The only exertions conformable to truth and reason are those founded upon the recognition *che tutto è nulla*, and, as we here arrive at the *apex* of all paradox in the shape of a contradiction in terms, it seems not easy to carry this part of the description further in detail. Pain, again, is cruel to us: but tedium, weariness, and disgust are even worse. Sometimes he tells us there is nothing real except pain. Sometimes that not even pain is real. Truth and reason are our implacable foes; they do nothing but reveal misery and hopelessness. Nature it is true resists, but then nature lies. As to a future state, it was a most mischievous invention; because before men thought of it, they might, at any rate, have an undisturbed hope of escape by death.

If in his letters this be declamation, it is earnest and deliberate enough in his philosophical writings. It is impossible to escape from the natural conclusions by pleading the form of Dialogue: first, because the reasons of its adoption are patent; next, because in the *Pensieri*, to quote no other case, he passes out of that form and speaks in the first person. There are places, indeed, where he seems as if he had been trying earnestly, though hopelessly, to keep a slippery hold upon some fragment of belief; but the end is, always and obviously, conscious failure. It is needless to quote; the dark and hopeless doctrine blackens nearly every page, and the marks of high and noble gifts with which it is mixed serve to make the gloom more palpable and thick. Those who desire, without the pain of traversing so dreary a course at length, to see his miserable no-creed summed up will find it in the verses

* V., p. 160, 163, 164, 167. But it is needless to cite particular passages in proof.

(a poem

(a poem they can hardly be called) *A Se Stesso,* * anticipating death.

Yet even in his philosophy he shows to advantage as compared with his friend Giordani, who is a mere railer at the world, and contends that life is detestable and insupportable to the good, and that its advantages are only for the wicked.† Leopardi's reply is remarkable. It is not so, he says: for the best advantage of this world consists in its nobler illusions of glory, love, virtue, and the like, and such illusions as these never come to the bad. There are traces, indeed, here and there of that materialistic ‡ tendency which appears to characterise particularly the Italian mind when it has been in aberration: but they are partial and rare.

It may be thought that if such be the real character of Leopardi's philosophy, we should have done better to pass it by than to expose it to the reader's eye. But in the first place there can be no more futile, no more mischievous conception, than that faith is to be kept entire by hiding from view the melancholy phenomena of unbelief. And, secondly, the kind of unbelief, which is really unworthy of any notice except simple denunciation, is that which attacks us through the sense of ridicule, or insinuates itself by bribing the passions. It is not so with Leopardi. His philosophy, and his frame of mind in connexion with it, present more than any other that we know, more even than those of Shelley, the character of unrelieved, unredeemed desolation. The very qualities in it which attract pitying sympathy deprive it of all seductive power. Antecedently to confutation by reasoning, it carries with it its own antidote. It was not a voluptuous, a scoffing, a frivolous, a wanton infidelity, but one mournful and self-torturing; one that, in hiding from view any consolatory truth, consumed all enjoyment, peace, and hope in the mind that harboured it. Unbelief was to him the cannon-ball:

'Shattering that it may reach, and shattering what it reaches.' §

Religion took its flight from him like the fabled deities from Troy, when Destruction had begun, and in order that Destruction might proceed. There was left to Leopardi this melancholy distinction, that he has brought more nearly than any other person to uniformity, if not to consistency, the philosophy of nullity, misery, and despair.

In his poetry, indeed, he challenged death aloud:—

'Me certo troverai, qual si sia l' ora
Che tu le penne al mio pregar dispieghi,
Erta la fronte, armato

* Op. I., p. 97. † Op. VI., p. 366.
‡ Vol. II., p. 88. Il corpo è l' uomo.
§ Coleridge's Wallenstein.

E renitente

E renitente al fato
La man che flagellando si colora
Nel mio sangue innocente
Non ricolmar di lode,
Non benedir, com' usa
Per antica viltà l' umana gente,
Ogni vana speranza onde consola
Se coi fanciulli il mondo
Gittar da me: null' altro in alcun tempo
Sperar, se non te sola:
Solo aspettar sereno
Quel dì, ch' io pieghi addormentato il capo
Nel tuo virgineo seno.' *

But he was not commonly a Capaneus bidding defiance to the thunders of heaven, nor a Prometheus who drew moral strength from the great deeds that he felt he had done for man, but he resembled rather the Hercules of the Trachiniæ, or Philoctetes in Lemnos, when under the agony of his wound he

'made the welkin ring again,
And fetched shrill echoes from the hollow earth;'

or like Œdipus when he recoiled from the discovery of the terrible enigma, bowed his head to the strength of Destiny, and was driven by its tempest, homeless and hopeless, through the earth.

As, therefore, no case has ever existed in which the claim to pity and sympathy was stronger, so never was there one in which it could more safely be indulged. His scepticism, at least, did not stoop to baseness, did not drive its bargain with the passions: nor had he the presumption of those who, having hidden from their view the sun of the Gospel and created a darkness for themselves, light some farthing candle of their own in its stead. The place from which he had driven the 'sacred mother of humanity,' the Catholic faith, he would not attempt to occupy with any inferior scheme. In the vacant shrine he set up no idol. For common speculative liberalism, and for the opinions of the day, he had a contempt as energetic even as his revulsion from theology, and as deeply imprinted on his whole mental constitution. †

It is indeed true that scarcely any notice of Christian doctrine is to be found in his works. In one place, referring to the Bruto Minore and his prose comment upon it, of which the theme is the nullity of virtue, he says he has inserted the qualifications *umanamente parlando* and *non parlo delle virtù teologali.*‡ But

* Amore e Morte, Canz. XXVII., Op. I., p. 93.
† See, for example, the 'Palinodia al Marchese Gino Capponi,' Op. I., p. 106
‡ Op. III., p. 101.

this is a thin and shadowy pretext. Probably his mind was averse both from polemical writing and from the whole subject matter of Christian theology: direct attacks, too, upon the Church would have brought him to open war with his father, and probably could not have passed through the press. But his doctrines as they stand cut off the stream even nearer to the fountain-head. His quarrel seems less with the Church (he tells us he observed *novenas* and *triduos* to obtain the grace of a speedy death *) than with Christianity; and not so much with Christianity as with the whole ground not only of revelation, but of natural religion in its first and simplest elements. Wonderful as it may seem, his writings in their general effect go as near as human language well can go to evincing a total disbelief in God, the soul, and immortality. And yet there is a passage, even in his speculative essays, which bears a touching, would to God it were an intentional, resemblance to the great primordial idea of Christianity. It is the *Storia del genere umano,* and is as beautiful in language as in thought.† For a great part of the history of man, he relates, human life was consoled by his favourite characters, certain *Larve*, or Phantasms, under the names of Justice, Patriotism, Glory, Hope, Virtue, and so on, including Sensual Love. But men were not satisfied with these, and prayed for Truth. Truth drove the Phantasms away except one, the last and least of them, from whom some inferior and feeble solace continued to be derived. Terrible was the advent and the reign of Truth: even those who had loudly invoked now as loudly blasphemed it; but they could not escape; they were wretched, and their wretchedness was to last for ever. We will give the rest as it stands:—‡

'Ora Giove, compassionando alla nostra somma infelicità, propose agli immortali se alcuno di loro fosse per indurre l' animo a visitare, come avevano usato in antico, e racconsolare in tanto travaglio questa loro progenie, e particolarmente quelli che dimostravano essere, quanto a se, indegni della sciagura universale. Al che, tacendo tutti gli altri, Amore, figliuolo di Venere Celeste, conforme di nome al fantasma così chiamato, di virtù e di opere diversissimo, si offerse (come è singolare fra tutti i numi la sua pietà) di fare esso l' ufficio proposto da Giove, e scendere dal cielo: donde egli mai per l' avanti non si era tolto, non sofferendo il concilio degli immortali, per averlo indicibilmente caro, che egli si partisse, anco per piccolo tempo, dal loro commercio. . . . .

'Dopo il qual tempo, non suole anco scendere se non di rado, e poco si ferma: così per la generale indignità della gente umana, come che gli Dei sopportano molestissimamente la sua lontananza. Quando viene in sulla terra, sceglie i cuori più teneri e più gentili delle persone più generose e magnanime: e quivi siede per breve spazio:

* Op. VI., p. 195. † Op., vol. I., p. 143. ‡ P. 161.

diffondendovi

diffondendovi sì pellegrina e mirabile soavità, ed empiendoli di affetti sì nobili, e di tanta virtù e fortezza, che eglino allora provano, cosa altutto nuova nel genere umano, piuttosto verità che rassomiglianza di beatitudine.'

What reality corresponding to this picture may have existed in his mind, lying deeper and more inward than his consciousness, it is not ours to inquire. Let it not be thought we have done injustice by citing a pagan allegory. The pagan parts of these compositions are the most cheering. When the reader passes from his *Dialogues* and *Thoughts* into the translations from Epictetus and Socrates, he will at once feel that he breathes in a fresher and purer atmosphere. There is one material passage* only in all the works of his manhood—so guardedly did he shape his course—where he refers to our Saviour, and that is to notice a point of partial contact with his doctrine: for Christ, he says, was the first that distinctly denounced that scoffing hypocrite and servile tyrant, the *world*, and gave currency to the term in this signification: adding that the idea had not occurred to any one before, perhaps because meanness and fraud had not until that age attained their perfect maturity.

We shall not dwell upon the sorrowful detail of his life. Virtual constraint kept him at Recanati till twenty-four; necessity, after he had left it, drew him back, and kept him there more than once. When his spirit rose with some partial return of health and eyesight, he redoubled the labours to which he had to look for subsistence while living in Florence or Bologna, but which, in feeding the stream, destroyed the source. It was in 1828, as he states,† that his strength finally broke down; but it was not until 1832 that he at length sought a monthly allowance (of less than fifty shillings) from his family: and he obtained it.‡ His heart was set on Florence, but he feared its winters; and in the autumn of 1833 he went to Naples, and passed there, with his friend Ranieri, the short and sad and early evening of his days.

On the 14th of June, 1837, he died, and the event is related by his friend with a simplicity partaking of the character of nakedness, and leaving a painful sense upon the mind of a blank unfilled. 'Life was stifled at its very source,' he says, after describing the state of the heart, 'and he resigned his exalted spirit with a smile, in the arms of a friend who has never ceased to love and to lament him.'

In the ponderous preface to his ponderous book, *Il Gesuita Moderno*, Gioberti charges the order of Jesuits, *inter alia*, with systematic lying for the purposes of piety, and with understanding pious purposes to be only and all those which are pursued through

* Vol. ii. p. 168. † VI., p. 195. ‡ Ibid., p. 194.

the medium of the Society. He has stated his case with great force both of information and argument, and his book might be compared to the heavy artillery advancing in the rear of the inimitable Provincial Letters, had not these last the singular property of being at once the weightiest and the smartest of all controversial writings. Our present intention, however, is simply to extract from the pages of Gioberti an instance of audacity so far beyond all common efforts in that kind, that it should be held up conspicuously to public notice. It is to be found in a letter written by a certain Father Scarpa of that order, and it refers to Leopardi. It bears date May 28, 1846, and was published in a journal entitled *Scienza e Fede*, though to which of these categories pure fiction belongs it would not be easy to determine. Except in the case of a very early work, we have not presumed to translate Leopardi's exquisitely classical Italian: we shall, however, take that liberty with Scarpa.

'The last sentiments of Giacomo Leopardi touching religion:—

'Since our distinguished countryman, the Padre Carlo Curci of the order of Jesuits, related in his *Facts and Arguments*, in reply to Gioberti, that the author of the *Filippo Ottonieri* (one of Leopardi's *Operette*) had attained in his last days to a better knowledge of the end for which men are born into the world, and thus had changed from his former self, there have not been wanting men venturesome enough to deny this honour to our illustrious countryman, as it appeared to them to be a stain upon his memory. So strangely now-a-days are praise and abuse confounded! Hence this paper will serve both to restate the narrative of Curci, and to clear the reputation of Leopardi from the taint with which the opinions he formerly held had soiled it.'

The letter then runs as follows:—

'Most Reverend Father in Christ,—In reply to your most esteemed communication I have to say, that among the great consolations I have experienced during my apostolic ministry was numbered that of witnessing the repentance, and reconciliation to the Church, of that great genius, Giacomo Leopardi. And would that it had pleased God to grant him a longer life, inasmuch as we should actually have had him in our society, as he intended and had confided to me. But God was pleased instead to call him to Himself shortly after his conversion.

'The circumstances were these. In the year 1836, while I was hearing confessions at the Gesù in Naples, I observed that this youth on several mornings placed himself opposite my confessional, looked fixedly at me for a time, as if he had wished to attract my eye, and then went away. One morning that he saw me disengaged from penitents, he approached me, and with a soft smile and refined deportment he addressed to me this sentence:—"Father, I should greatly desire to confess to you, because you have ravished me by the charming manner

manner in which you receive your penitents;* but before coming to the act of confession I wish to have a long discourse with you apart." I led him into the parlour beside the sacristy, and here he opened to me explicitly all his heart and life; and thus much I am at liberty to say, partly because it will contribute to general edification, partly because it does not touch the matter of the confession. "I had," he said, "an excellent education in an Italian boarding school from my tenderest years, when I completed at fifteen my course of study in *belles lettres* and in philosophy. Having finished my education at this early age, I devoted myself to the study of the law, and consorting with companions liberal in matters of religion and in their general opinions, as well as by the constant perusal of impious books, chiefly those of the innovators and pretended philosophers of France, I became a perfect atheist: and so I have continued until now, although with occasional flashes of light upon my mind and strong impulses of my heart (to amendment). During this period, as I would not listen to the wise admonitions and corrections of my most pious father, I was put out of doors, and from that time I have wandered among various cities of Italy, and for between three and four years have been fixed in Naples. Here, having had the advantage of intercourse with a learned ecclesiastic" (he did not mention the name) "and having several times entered into discussion about religion, I began to get some light and to return to myself. Afterwards, not being able any longer to resist the impulses of grace, I determined to betake myself to some Father of the Company of Jesus to be further enlightened, although I had held that company in great abhorrence through the great number of books against it that I had read."

'Hereupon he held various conversations with me, and having calmed his mind through my feeble instrumentality, strengthened by grace and by some good books I gave him to read, he reconciled himself to God by the sacrament of penance. He formed with me a friendship so affectionate, that several times he disclosed to me that he would gladly pass the residue of his days with me, as he said, showing the desire to enter into the Company, if the Lord should restore his health wasted by incessant application. He continued, subsequently, to confess at intervals for four or five months; I, too, went to visit and confess him several times at the Hospital of Incurables in a room hired there. Then he went away to Castellamare to drink the mineral waters, evincing great dissatisfaction at parting from me: and in that place he died of cholera, nor was I able to go and see him, on account of having left Naples for Beneventum. My greatest regret when I afterwards heard of his death was not to be in possession of various papers that he designed to publish, as he had assured me, and that would have sufficiently made known his altered sentiments in respect

* We ought to subjoin the original of the passage, because to our minds this exaggerated and affected language, so unlike Leopardi, bears of itself the strongest evidence against the accuracy, if not the veracity, of the narrator. It is—*Padre, avrei a cuore di confessarmi a lei, perche mi ha rapito colle sue belle maniere in accogliere i penitenti.* What a dancing-master's speech!

to

to religion. Leopardi was thirty years old when he died; gifted with a soul full of sincerity, beauty, and greatness, of a good height, a most vivid eye, and a countenance amiable and refined, an enemy of vice, a friend of virtue, in matter of religion alone once astray, but afterwards thoroughly reclaimed. 21 May, 1846.—*Francesco Scarpa.*'*

The answer need not be so long. Gioberti quietly proceeds to say:—

'The story put together in this letter is a tissue of lies and deliberate inventions, and a sheer romance from beginning to end.'

He then enumerates the falsehoods as follows:—

1. It is false that Leopardi was educated in a boarding school. He never was in one at all.

2. False that he took to the study of law. He never did. We may add, that of all great subjects, law is the one of which we find the faintest traces in the six volumes of his works. In 1817 he writes, 'Dio mi scampi da Giustiniano e dal Digesto, che non potrei digerire in eterno.'†

3. False that he had companions from whom he drew his opinions. He studied in the solitude of his father's house, at Recanati.

4. False that he was expelled from that house; to which, on the contrary, he frequently repaired to please his parents. We must add here, that it appears from later testimony that, on the contrary, his father's resolution was to shut him in, not to shut him out; to keep him at home,‡ while he was struggling to be allowed to leave it, and even at one time arranging measures for an escape by stealth, and (apparently) to purloin money with that view.

5. False that he was in the hospital of Incurables.

6. False that he died in Castellamare; it was at Naples.

7. False that he was thirty years old. He was nearly thirty-nine.

8. False that he died of cholera; his disease was dropsy.

9. False that in his last days he wrote in contradiction to his former opinions; since shortly before his death he arranged with his friend (and host or companion to the last) Ranieri, for the republication of his works, which took place accordingly.

10. False that he changed his opinions in his last days. He composed in his last sickness the Paralipomeni, where he exhibits them in all their nakedness,§ and dictated the conclusion of that poem two or three days before his death.

---

* Translated from the Gesuita Moderno, vol. i., Discorso Preliminare, p. cc.
† V., 57. ‡ Op. V., pp. 140, 141, 153; and VI., p. 355.
§ See, for example, Canto VIII. the (last), Stanzas X. and XV.

11. False

11. False that his eyes were vivid (*vivacissimi*). They were soft and pensive, says Gioberti; languid,* says Ranieri.

We will make up the dozen by adding—

12. False that he was of good or ordinary height (*statura giusta*). We are assured by those who knew him well in his later years that he was of very small stature. Ranieri says it was *statura mediocre chinata ed esile.*† His friend Brighenti speaks of the great soul *sotto quelle apparenze meschine.*‡ And lastly, he calls himself, in his twentieth year, *sciatello e sottilissimo,* and again declares his personal appearance to be *dispregievolissima.*§ Indeed there appears to have been something of positive deformity in his figure.

Gioberti published in 1846. The *Epistolario,* published during the present year, contains a passage referring to Scarpa's letter ‖ in similar terms, without any comment, from which we infer that the case of Gioberti stands unshaken. In truth, it would be absurd to suppose that the Company can shake it, because the chief part is grounded upon matters of fact known to the world; and the rest upon assertions sustained at every point, not only by the testimony of honourable men, but by the highest circumstantial evidence; so that the clumsiness of the imposture is even more astonishing than its wickedness. If this really be the case, as it seems, what are we to say of Scarpa? Except, indeed, what Manzoni has said of the informers during the plague of Milan: *diventando infami, rimanevano oscuri.*¶ Perhaps he is but one of the *Larve:* we trust it may be so; but *some* pen must have traced the mendacious characters.

It remains then, we fear, unquestionable, that he continued to the last in that utter and dismal abnegation of the Christian faith which had come upon him before the middle of his life with his other heavy and yet minor calamities. He alludes, indeed, to a future state in a letter to a friend, whom, he says, he scarcely hopes to meet except κατ' ἀσφόδελον λειμῶνα.** In his letters to his father he habitually uses language that is only consistent or even decent in the mouth of a Christian. But the counter evidence of his sincere, deliberate, and unbiassed declarations in every imaginable form, as well as the mode in which he speaks of religion when writing to Giordani and Brighenti, who had his confidence, is too clear to leave a shadow of doubt upon the melancholy truth of the case. Now, when we meet with an instance of this kind, in which the possession of God's choicest natural gifts of genius, knowledge, and feeling is combined with a blind-

* Op. I., p. xxvii. † Ibid. ‡ III., 452. § Op. V., pp. 71, 86.
‖ Op., vol. v. p. xi.
¶ In the '*Colonna Infama.*' ** Dec. 22, 1836. Op. III., p. 482.

ness

ness to His crowning mercy, whether we can or cannot account for the melancholy conjunction, it is wicked to deny, it is weak to explain it away; it is weaker still to attempt to get rid of it by attenuating the truth of revelation, in order to force it into a kind of resemblance to some sentiment on which an exaggerated and inflated sense is put in order, as it were, to meet it half-way from the other side. This is to destroy what is really needful for us, —the integrity of the Gospel—in order to do what is not needful, and is commonly wrong, namely, to pass a judgment upon our fellow-creatures. Never let it be forgotten that there is scarcely a single moral action of a single man of which other men can have such a knowledge, in its ultimate grounds, its surrounding incidents, and the real determining causes of its merits, as to warrant their pronouncing a conclusive judgment upon it. When St. Peter, after the prophecy of his own martyrdom, asked our Lord, with a natural curiosity, what should happen to St. John, our Lord replied, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.' So let us not be inquisitive or solicitous to know the judgment to be pronounced upon our brethren, or to solve the enigmas of their destiny, but take heed to our own; and take particular heed that we do it no prejudice by proud or harsh feelings entertained towards them.

At the same time, it is right to observe that the conjunction, so paradoxical to us, between the moral and intellectual gifts of Leopardi and his blindness to the Christian faith, is in reality less startling than at first sight it may appear. We have seen the depth of his abiding sorrow; let us consider its causes, or such of them, at least, as meet the eye: poverty, domestic disquietude, extreme ill health, attended with nervous depression, and the total suspension for long intervals of the use both of the power of thought and of the gift of sight, the medium of his studies,—of those studies by which the fountain of his thoughts was fed. Genius, attended commonly with a highly acute and susceptible nervous organization, would, in all probability, render him not more, but far less, able to maintain the perfect equilibrium of his mind, than one who had less weight to carry in his ever-labouring brain, a fire less intense burning within him. Nor do we attach a diminished, but an enhanced, importance to these considerations, from the circumstance that he has himself eagerly protested against the supposition that his sufferings affected his speculations. He writes from Florence on the 24th of May, 1832, suddenly using the French language, as if that he might be heard throughout the great theatre of the world:—*

'Quels que soient mes malheurs, qu'on a jugé à propos d'étaler, et

* Opere, vol. iii. p. 481; vol. vi. p. 190.

que

que peut être on a un peu exagérés dans ce journal, j'ai eu assez de courage pour ne pas chercher à en diminuer le poids ni par des frivoles espérances d'une prétendue félicité future et inconnue, ni par une lâche résignation. Mes sentiments envers la destinée ont été et sont toujours ceux que j'ai exprimés dans *Bruto Minore*. C'a été par suite de ce même courage, qu'étant amené par mes recherches à une philosophie désespérante, je n'ai pas hésité à l'embrasser toute entière: tandis que, de l'autre côté, ce n'a été que par effet de la lacheté des hommes, qui ont besoin d'être persuadés du mérite de l'existence, que l'on a voulu considérer mes opinions philosophiques comme le résultat de mes souffrances particulières, et que l'on s'obstine à attribuer à mes circonstances matérielles ce qu'on ne doit qu'à mon entendement. Avant de mourir je vais protester contre cette invention de la faiblesse et de la vulgarité, et prier mes lecteurs de s'attacher à détruire mes observations et mes raisonnements plutôt que d'accuser mes maladies.'

It is not, however, simply to his maladies that we refer. Bodily indisposition, however severe and varied, has been and may be borne, but the great resisting force necessary to neutralize its attacks cannot, consistently with the laws of our nature, be applied in all directions at once; from some of them must be drawn the energy that is to be spent in others. Neither his home, his country, nor his church offered to the mind of Leopardi the support that the heavy pressure on it required; but each, on the contrary, appears to have been an ever-fresh blister to his sores. Exhaustion under bereavements such as these is no sign of a cowardly or a vulgar spirit. It may with some truth be said, that one whose mental action could remain undisturbed by them, would show an insensibility quite out of the common range of human nature, and diverging from it on the side of what is brutal, rather than of what is divine.

Under such fiery trials the commonplace and every-day Christianity of the lip will not suffice; a man will either go on to the faith which removes mountains, or he will go backwards into misery and despair.

As to his domestic relations, the attempt has been made by his editors to veil them with a delicate reserve; but it has been ineffectual, as it could not be uniformly sustained. It is too plain, notwithstanding the mere *formulæ* of attachment (copious as they are) and probably the honest effort to cherish the dying flame, that between his father and himself there was from an early date a want of all real confidence, together with many active causes of irritation and estrangement. Though he was even fondly attached to other members of his family, yet his intellectual wants were in no degree, it would appear, met by them, for he was, from age, and yet more from precocity, too far in advance of even his next brother; and they seem to have had from an early date, with a warm

warm reciprocal attachment, great differences of opinion. Until he was twenty-five he had to choose between something like imprisonment at home and dependence on himself for the supply of all his wants in the event of his leaving it, in a country where it was impossible to live by literature until he had made his reputation, and where he must starve while making it. The generous efforts made by Niebuhr and Bunsen to obtain public employment for him in Italy failed on account of his being a layman, and he had not physical strength to brave the German climate. At home, however, he was in possession of the comforts rendered necessary by his wretched health; yet his letters teem with passages showing how he detested it. There are, indeed, references to the climate which he disliked, but it was the moral and social atmosphere that he acutely hated. Once he calls Recanati a hermitage, but more generally a desert, a cage, a cavern, a prison, a dark hole, a Tartarus, a tomb. The March is, he says, the darkest part of Italy, and Recanati of the March:* its literature consists of neither more nor less than the alphabet. It is true that he was ill satisfied with Rome, but whenever he got back to Recanati, though he certainly loved many members of his family, a sentiment of disgust at once returned upon him. Even while there he had not money to buy books or take horse exercise, though very needful for his health.† In short, he felt the pinch of poverty, and that sharply. Nor was the scale of his wishes extravagant: from two hundred to two hundred and fifty crowns a-year was all that he sought in his most ambitious mood: twelve crowns a month was what in his extremest need he begged of his father. 'I will submit,' he said, 'to such privations, that 12 scudi shall suffice for me. Death would be better; but for death I must look to God.'‡ In his last days, therefore, when he was at Castellamare,§ he could not possibly consult a physician, because it would have cost fifteen ducats, not much more than two pounds, to have brought one from Naples. It appears, indeed, that the fortune of the family was at the time below its rank.‖ Yet it also appears as if the daughter was to have a portion of some forty thousand francs on her marriage. Giacomo was the eldest son. On the whole it seems probable that the *argumentum a crumenâ* was put in operation against his unruly opinions, and with no other effect than that of maddening them.

In considering, however, a case so remarkable, it will occur to the mind to ask whether the study of pagan antiquity is probably to be reckoned among the causes of his religious desolation? and

* Op. V., p. 218. † Ibid., pp. 58, 59, 254.
‡ Op. VI., p. 196. § Ibid., p. 228.
‖ Ibid., p. 121. Text, and note of the editor.

the

the question is too nearly related to the dearest interests of England, whose choicest youth are trained almost from infancy to read and to digest both the thoughts and the diction of Latin and Greek authors, to be dismissed without notice; the more so as there is an opinion floating, so to speak, though it can scarcely be said to be current among ourselves, that the religious tendencies of our own system are questionable. In our view the answer may be said to lie in a single sentence, and it is this, that classical studies require the powerful corrective which Christian studies supply; that with this corrective they afford not only the most admirable discipline to the understanding, taste, and power of expression, but likewise the strongest secondary assurances of the truth and the need of the Gospel; but that without it they are full of danger. And the corrective lies not merely in the knowledge of Christian doctrine by rote; not merely in being acquainted, as we cannot doubt that Leopardi was in his youth acquainted, with its technical distribution according to the current theology; but in the true and living knowledge of it, in the application of the mind to Christian study with the same energetic tension with which pagan philosophy, history, poetry, and languages are studied. This application of the mind the practical system of the Church of Rome in Italy regulates and fetters even on the part of the clergy, dreads and utterly discourages on the part of the laity. 'Prove all things: hold fast that which is good,' is a precept which England has fearlessly accepted, and from the universal application of which she has not shrunk, alive to the serious dangers of her course, but bent upon its transcendant and inestimable advantages. It is, we believe, to this cause that we may refer the unquestionable fact that classical studies in this country are not found to have any sceptical tendency, and that the University of Oxford finds in Aristotle one of her most powerful engines of ethical, and indirectly of Christian, teaching. But then there must be real and vital activity of the mind upon the subject matter of religion, as there is upon the subject matter of pagan learning. Greece and Rome present to us great and masculine developments of our common nature, and wonderful triumphs achieved by them in every department both of mental and of practical effort: the mind cannot embrace them, cannot reap its reward in the appreciation of them, without the exertion of its powers at their topmost bent. We should shudder for the consequences, if our Christian studies became shackled, dry, and formal, and if thought were to owe its richness, and taste its refined discernment,—and, above all, if mental freedom and enjoyment were to refer their recollections either wholly or principally to those heathen sources. And, too plainly, thus it was with

with Leopardi. It was not from the Genius of the Gospel that he had learned to mould the accents of his mind, to exercise the high prerogatives of his genius; it was on the mount of the Parthenon, and not of Sion; by the waters of Ilissus, not by the brook of Cedron. Homer and Hesiod, and Plato most of all, were to him for patriarch and for prophet; and to those works, which he latterly translated, we are persuaded that he went as with a sentiment of religion, as seeking for a Gospel in their generally high-toned though narrow morality, and recognising in them not only the beautiful dream of his imagination and the food of his powerful understanding, but the whole substance of his inner life. He exactly reversed the Christianised invocation of Tasso and enthroned the muse of Helicon again.*

Politics occupy the very smallest space in his works, and there is only enough to show that he was dissatisfied with the tone of the Legitimist party, to which his father belonged, while he was no friend to revolutions, which took the bread, scanty enough in his case, out of the mouths of literary men. As to religion, the way in which he commonly refers to it suggests that there must have been some most serious original error in the mode of presenting it to his mind. He seems not like a man casting it off, but like one who had never put it on. Sometimes we find its language used in that half-vague and half-jesting tone which suggests that he adhered to it by mere custom, and without more thought of a meaning than his less instructed countrymen when they use their favourite *Corpo di Bacco*. Sometimes, when it comes in connexion with some idea of pain, calamity, or death, it almost seems as if he had been taught it in the sense of those savage tribes who believe in a good spirit and a malignant one, but worship the latter only because the first, they say, will do them no harm, but the other must be continually intreated not to afflict, torment, or destroy them. This was not from unacquaintance with religious persons. *Con tutta la poca età*, he says at eighteen, *ho molta pratica di devoti*.† And without resorting to any invidious supposition, we may state that his father was known by his published papers to be a man of extreme opinions even in the Roman Church. We have before us a work of his, printed at Lugano in 1841, and bearing the title *La Santa Casa di Loreto; Discussioni Istoriche e Critiche del Conte Monaldo Leopardi*. It would be impossible to give, except by much detail, an adequate idea either of the unsuspecting *bona fides* or of the anile imbecility, combined with a certain perverse ingenuity, of this pseudo-critical production. The old Count had no 'blank misgivings, questionings.' He had just reason enough to guide him to the

* Ger., Lib. I. 3. † Op., vol. v. p. 31.

perception

perception that the current hypotheses concerning the *Santa Casa* must be false: but his lamp then went out, and, secure in the midst of murky Erebus, he sets up one which even the faintest twilight must have dispelled, namely, this, that the House of the Annunciation, which undoubtedly had disappeared from Nazareth in the first Christian ages, and which arrived in Italy, he conceives, about the middle of the twelfth century, lay concealed in some unknown place, by the special command of the Almighty, for the period of between a thousand and twelve hundred years before that miraculous event. Nor is this unexampled, he says, in the providential order of things: for as He was pleased to conceal Australia for six thousand years, so He might very well have hidden the Santa Casa for a fifth or a sixth part only of that time! And yet this same critical investigator—after reading the *Operette Morali*, which come as near to pure atheism as any work of the human mind can, and that not here and there, but in the grain—was content, it appears, to suggest corrections of it for the next edition, which the son freely promised to adopt!*

We have felt this publication to be really and painfully illustrative both of the domestic relations of a man constituted like Giacomo Leopardi, and of his violent reaction in the matter of religious belief. What a measureless interval must have separated at every point the mental framework of these two men so closely allied in blood! And what a repelling influence must the mind of the son have experienced in its early and ductile stages, from being accustomed to contemplate conscientious piety under the disguise, if not of these, yet of similar extravagances, and to identify it with them! Nor will our labour have been wholly without fruit, if it shall serve to bring into view the fearful dangers of that abuse of reasoning and contempt of history and of the laws of sound criticism which is so painfully characteristic of devoteeship in the Church of Rome, and which receives but too much of toleration, and even of encouragement, at the hands of her authorities, on account of the powerful agencies which by these means they are enabled to bring to bear upon the popular mind. There will thus be left upon the mind of the reader a deeper persuasion of the truth that the God of Revelation is also the God of Reason, that the laws of prudence and common sense are laws of religion as well as of life, and that he who in one generation lifts up belief to the edge of a giddy precipice, does but prepare the way for another to dash it at a single stroke into the cold, and dark, and cheerless void ever yawning at its foot.

Yet another word before we close. We have endeavoured in these pages to do justice without fear, not only to the genius, but

* Op. VI., p. 220.

to

to the virtues of this great, and greatly unhappy, genius. The readiness in these slippery times to argue from every conjunction of high gifts and amiable qualities with unbelief against the authority of religion, constrains us to observe what we would willingly have passed by. Although he was, we believe, naturally as well as conventionally noble, there are things almost base in the letters of Leopardi, as when he writes to his sister, who it seems had shown a reluctance to an union with a profligate young man, in a tone not of admiration, not even of tenderness and sympathy, but of reproving argument, to tell her that all young men are profligate, that the one in question is now satiated, and will probably make a good husband, and that though he may be occasionally unfaithful, he will always maintain the appearance of fidelity. But further we must observe that, whether from an original fault of character or from a bad education, he had but little strictness in his view of the great cardinal virtue of truth. We may notice this in small things, as when he writes to his publisher to warn him that he had given a recommendatory letter to a friend for a translation from Tibullus, to which, as it was written under the friend's eye, no weight is to be attached. We may notice it also in far greater matters. On the subject of religion in his intercourse with his father, he was—the words are wrung from us—nothing less than systematically disingenuous. Eighteen days before his death,* he tells his father that the period decreed by God for his life is approaching, and hopes that he is going to eternal repose: but in a thousand places he had denied the doctrine of a Providence, and he was then, as Gioberti tells us expressly—and with this the account of Ranieri so far as it is in point agrees† —composing the last canto of the *Paralipomeni*, which, going beyond even his wont, turns into sheer ridicule the doctrine of a future state, and of responsibility in connexion with it.‡ But in lieu of all others, we will give another single instance. We have already quoted his memorable letter to De Sinner, who resided in Paris; it was written in French with a view, as is conjectured, to its being known. It was dated May 24, 1832. But on the 8th of July, 1831,§ he had written to his father that he could swear his works were mere poetry in prose, following one mythology or another *ad libitum*, as was allowed to poets, without being therefore called Buddhists, Pagans, Mahommedans, and so forth. And on the 28th of May, 1832,‖ he told his father again that though he did not agree *precisely* in the principles of the latter, *his* principles had never been irreligious in theory or in fact.

* Op. VI., p. 235. † Op. I., p. xv.
‡ Poesie, pp. 298-300; Paralip. VIII., st. 10–15. § Op. VI., p. 163.
‖ Op. VI., p. 192.

He

He apprises us elsewhere that no French or English journal ever reached Recanati, and it seems impossible to avoid supposing that he reckoned upon Count Monaldo's seclusion to secure him against discovery. It would be easy, but is also needless, to pursue the exhibition of this duplicity in detail. And what inference do we draw from these and like points established in evidence? Certainly not that we are to assume a liberty of denouncing him as a reprobate: not that we are to obliterate or forget the traces of goodness any more than the proofs of greatness which his works exhibit: but that we are to protest *in limine* against the title he attempts to vindicate for himself of a dispassionate inquirer, who has arrived by the full and undisturbed force of his intellect at given results. If disease, difficulty, privation, nervous depression so acted upon his mind as to sap there the foundations of virtue in some of its first elements, it is too much that we should be called upon to believe that in his renunciation of principles both lying at the root of all revealed religion, and sustained, as he admits, by the universal voice of Nature, he is to be estimated simply as a Pure Intelligence not swayed to the right hand or to the left either by the agony that tore, or the disgust and moral nausea that oppressed, his mind. But having said thus much, and having desired to say it gently, let us leave him with thoughts only of the pity which his great sorrows solicit, and of the admiration that his genius challenges. Some, indeed, may be disposed to regret that his editors have been unable to keep back the matter to which we have last adverted. Their performance of their task, though inspired with a devoted love, is certainly open to the remark, that they have omitted either too little or too much. The gaps in the letters are most numerous, and are commonly so placed as to suggest that the missing passages relate to the most critical points of opinion, character, and life. But without doubt it was better for a generation like our own, which, even amidst the increase of religious feeling, seems insensibly to relax its grasp upon objective truth, and to decline into feebler conceptions of its authority, that the case of Leopardi should be stated with at least that degree of fulness in which we now possess it. Lest in our desire to do justice to feeling and to taste, and lofty genius finding for itself a way to martyrdom through privation and intense and unremitting toil, we should have forgotten the verse with which he himself supplies us—

Deh quanto in verità vani siam nui! *

Lest we should have become unmindful of the temptations, the infirmities, and the deep degeneracy of our race, and should

* Op. I., p. 41. From 'Il primo Amore.'

have

have left a single reader predisposed even for one moment to the belief that any other waters than those which flowed from the bleeding side of the Redeemer can heal its plagues, any other wisdom than the 'foolishness' of the Gospel give it permanent, uniform, or consistent elevation.

Rapidly surveying the character of Leopardi as a writer, we cannot hesitate to say that in almost every branch of mental exertion, this extraordinary man seems to have had the capacity for attaining, and generally at a single bound, the very highest excellence. Whatever he does, he does in a manner that makes it his own; not with a forced or affected but a true originality, stamping upon his work, like other masters, a type that defies all counterfeit. He recalls others as we read him, but always the most remarkable and accomplished in their kind; always by conformity, not by imitation. In the Dorian march of his *terza rima* the image of Dante comes before us; in his blank verse we think of Milton (whom probably he never read); in his lighter letters, and in the extreme elegance of touch with which he describes mental gloom and oppression, we are reminded of the grace of Cowper; when he touches learned research or criticism, he is copious as Warburton, sagacious and acute as Bentley: the impassioned melancholy of his poems recalls his less, though scarcely less, deeply unhappy contemporary Shelley: to translation (we speak however of his prose versions) he brings the lofty conception of his work which enabled Coleridge to produce *his* Wallenstein; among his 'Thoughts' there are some worthy of a place beside the 'Pensées' of Pascal or the 'Moral Essays' of Bacon; and with the style of his philosophic Dialogues neither Hume nor Berkeley need resent a comparison. We write for Englishmen: but we know that some of his countrymen regard him as a follower, and as a rival, too, of Tasso and of Galileo in the respective excellences of verse and prose. Some of his editors go further, and pronounce him to be a discoverer of fundamental truths: an error in our view alike gross, mischievous, and inexcusable. Yet there are many things in which Christians would do well to follow him: in the warmth of his attachments, in the moderation of his wants, in his noble freedom from the love of money, in his all-conquering assiduity. Nor let us, of inferior and more sluggish clay, omit to learn, as we seem to stand by his tomb beside the Bay of Naples in the lowly church of San Vitale, yet another lesson from his career; the lesson of compassion, chastening admiration, towards him: and for ourselves, of humility and self-mistrust.

PRINTED BY W. CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET.

UNIVERSITY OF N.C. AT CHAPEL HILL
00028987927